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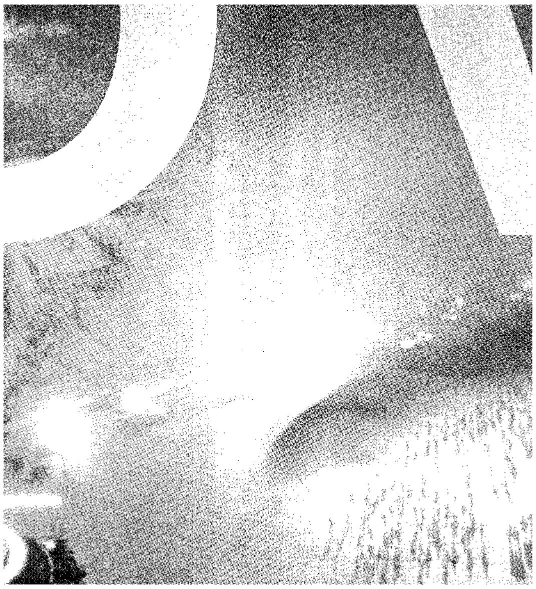
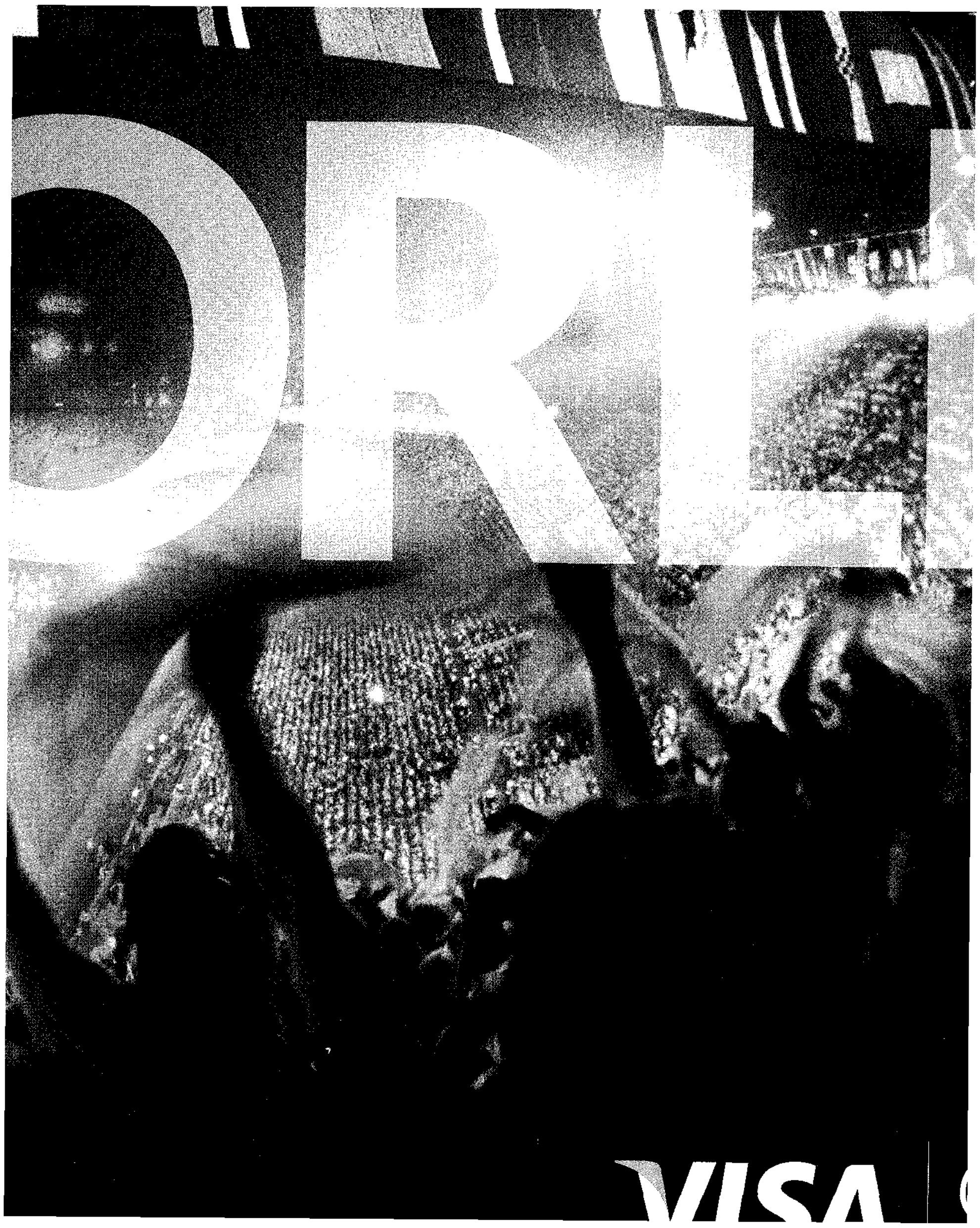
AUG. 4, 2008

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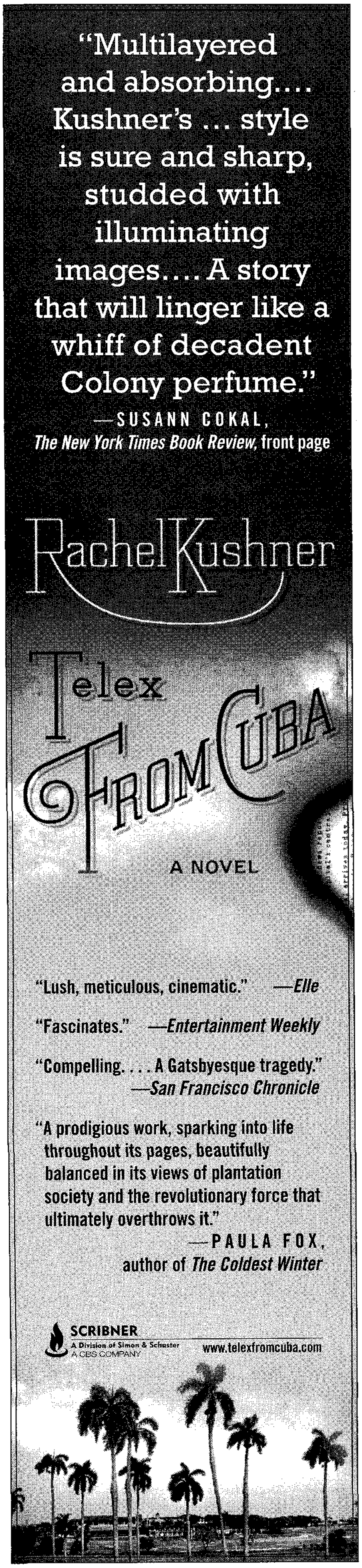

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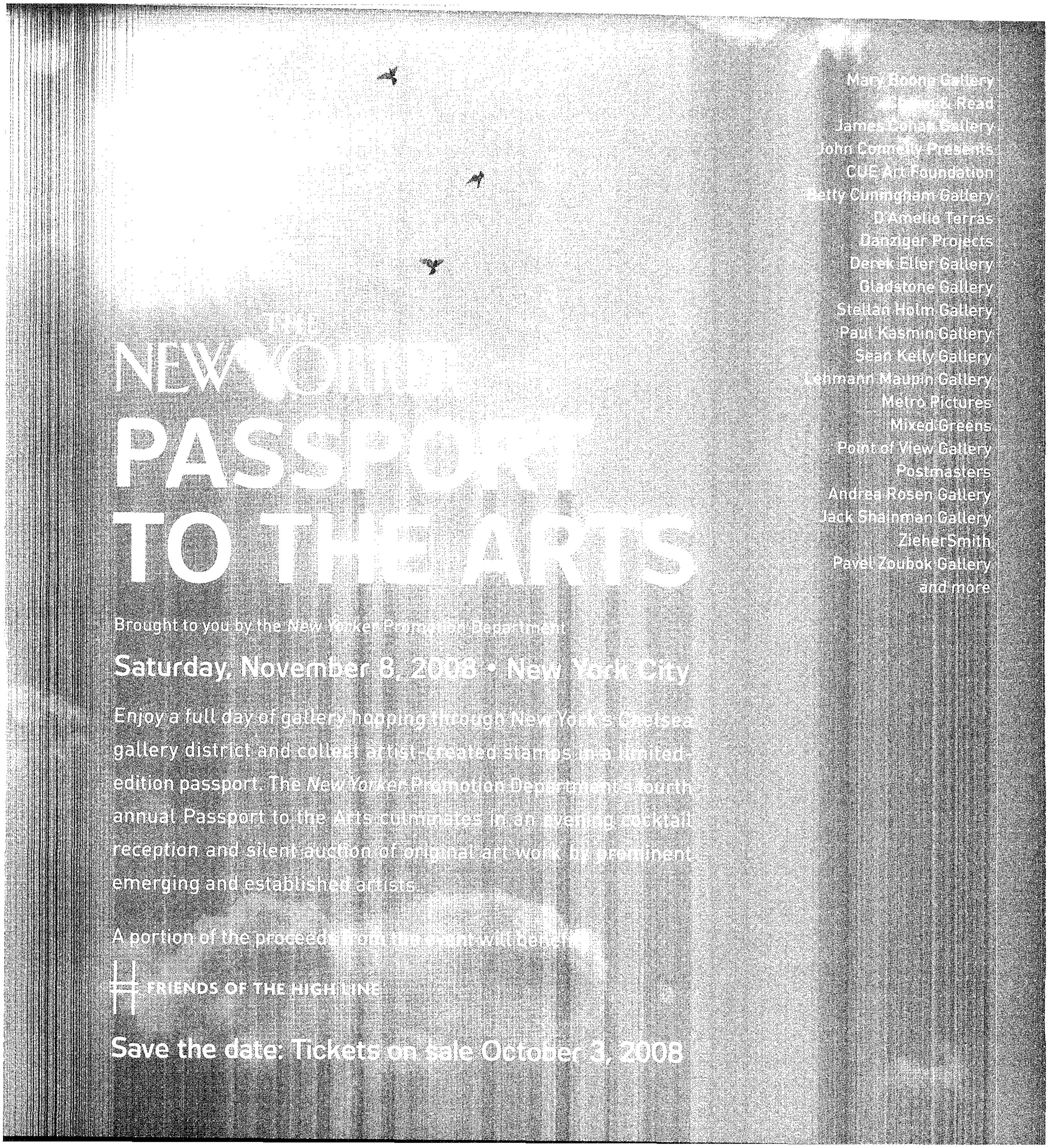

THE NEW YORKER

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CONTRIBUTORS

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William Dalrymple ("Serving the Goddess," p. 34) is a travel writer and historian who has written several books about India, including "The Last Mughal." His work will appear in an anthology, "AIDS Sutra: Untold Stories from India," due out in the fall.

Simon Rich (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 41), the author of "Ant Farm: And Other Desperate Situations," will publish his second book of humor pieces, "Free-Range Chickens," next month. He writes for "Saturday Night Live."

Julia Ioffe (The Talk of the Town, p. 25) is a freelance writer and a contributor to the magazine *Russia!*

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Ben McGrath (The Talk of the Town, p. 24; "A Soldier's Legacy," p. 42) has been writing for the magazine since 2002.

Louise Glück (Poem, p. 58) was the U.S. Poet Laureate for 2003-04. "Averno" is her tenth book of poems.

Roberto Bolaño (Fiction, p. 64), a Chilean novelist and poet, died in 2003. A translation of his novel "2666" comes out in November.

Judith Thurman (Books, p. 68), a staff writer, is the author of "Isak Dinesen: The Life of a Storyteller" and, most recently, "Cleopatra's Nose: 39 Varieties of Desire," a collection of *New Yorker* essays.

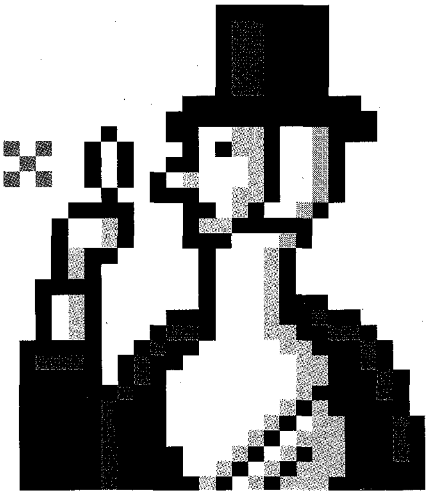
Peter Schjeldahl (The Art World, p. 74) won this year's Clark Prize for Excellence in Arts Writing. His book "Let's See: Writings on Art from *The New Yorker*" was published in May.

Sasha Frere-Jones (Pop Music, p. 76) is the magazine's pop-music critic.

Anthony Lane (The Current Cinema, p. 78) is a staff writer and a film critic for the magazine. "Nobody's Perfect" is a collection of his *New Yorker* reviews and profiles.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Audio: *David Remnick* discusses Obama's world tour with *Hendrik Hertzberg*, *Ryan Lizza*, and *George Packer*. / *Kelefa Sanneh* talks about Tavis Smiley and Obama. / The Naked Campaign videos, featuring *Steve Brodner*. / Ask the Author: *Ben McGrath* answers readers' questions about Alan Rogers. / The Book Bench, the Cartoon Lounge, and Goings On, plus blogs by *Dana Goodyear* and *Sasha Frere-Jones*. / From the archives: *Calvin Trillin* and *George Packer* on fallen soldiers, and complete campaign coverage. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a list of *New Yorker* events.



THE MAIL

THE EVOLUTION OF EVANGELICALISM

Frances FitzGerald, in her article on Dr. Joel C. Hunter, the senior pastor of Northland church, affirms the notion that "evangelical" and "liberal" are not mutually exclusive terms ("The New Evangelicals," June 30th). It was refreshing to read an article about Christians who are concerned about more than gay marriage and abortion. There is no doubt that the Bible promotes "the sanctity of life," as our President so often declares. However, applying this principle to fight stem-cell research and abortion, while engaging in a war that kills thousands of innocent civilians, and while the torture of detainees is accepted practice, seems like a contradiction. Homosexuality gets barely a mention in the Bible, compared with caring for the poor and the sick, preserving God's creation, and loving one's neighbor as oneself. My religious values certainly inform my political opinions. And, now that there are leaders like Tony Campolo, Ron Sider, and Jim Wallis, I can only hope that social justice, poverty, and the environment will finally take their rightful place on the evangelical political agenda.

Jessica Smith
Ipswich, Mass.

MAN VERSUS MACHINE

Attempts to develop speech-recognition technology appear to be based on the questionable assumption that nearly every caller would opt to speak to a real person rather than a machine ("Hello, HAL," by John Seabrook, June 23rd). However, an infinitely patient machine can be available twenty-four hours a day, every day, and it poses no social risks, such as self-consciousness or embarrassment. In a test that we conducted, pitting machine against real-person conversation, participants completed a brief personality survey and were then asked to choose one of three ways to organize their thoughts about their survey experience: interacting online with other participants, interacting with chatterbots, or private typing. We found that while most of our participants—forty-two per cent—chose real-person interaction, thirty-eight per cent chose machine (chatterbot) conversation. Follow-up experiments and analyses showed that the machine preference was stable and could not be attributed to participants' mood, to their perception of text-messaging difficulty, or to the novelty of a chatterbot. Some of us would rather stick to automation, whatever its limitations.

Timothy C. Brock
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Melanie C. Green
Assistant Professor of Psychology
University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill
Chapel Hill, N.C.

DECODING ITCHINESS

While scratching has evolved to get rid of dermatologic pests, it has also evolved in humans, apes, and monkeys as an ordinary social behavior for getting rid of interpersonal "pests" ("The Itch," by Atul Gawande, June 30th). Darwin observed that if a man is perplexed by a questioner he will scratch his head. "Itching to fight" and being "irritated" by a person who is an "itch" are intuitively recognized expressions of social predicaments. They incorporate eons of accumulated folk observations. In a frustrating social predicament, we can't help itching to fight, but scratching ourselves, instead of the offender, signals our intention to avoid a fight if others coöperate.

Herbert M. Adler
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Jefferson Medical College
Philadelphia, Pa.

•

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
RHYTHM MASTERS

Bill T. Jones, who won a Tony for best choreography for his refreshing, teen-angst-filled dance numbers in "Spring Awakening," returns to the stage with "Fela!," at 37 Arts. The musical, directed and choreographed by Jones, with a book by Jones and Jim Lewis, looks at the life of the famed Nigerian composer, performer, and activist Fela Anikulapo Kuti. Antibalas, the Brooklyn-based Afrobeat band, provides the music. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
HOT TIMES

To mark the centennial of the birth of Stéphane Grappelli, the largely self-taught violinist who, in Paris during the thirties, teamed up with the Gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt, the violinist Regina Carter and the French guitarist Dorado Schmitt headline a sizzling tribute concert at the Rose Theatre. (See page 10.)

ART
EXPRESSED LANES

On the eve of the First World War, the German Expressionist painter Ernst Ludwig Kirchner was obsessed by the street life—and the streetwalkers—of Berlin. The Museum of Modern Art exhibits seven major canvases alongside seventy related works on paper, all made between 1913 and 1915, in "Kirchner and the Berlin Street." (See page 10.)

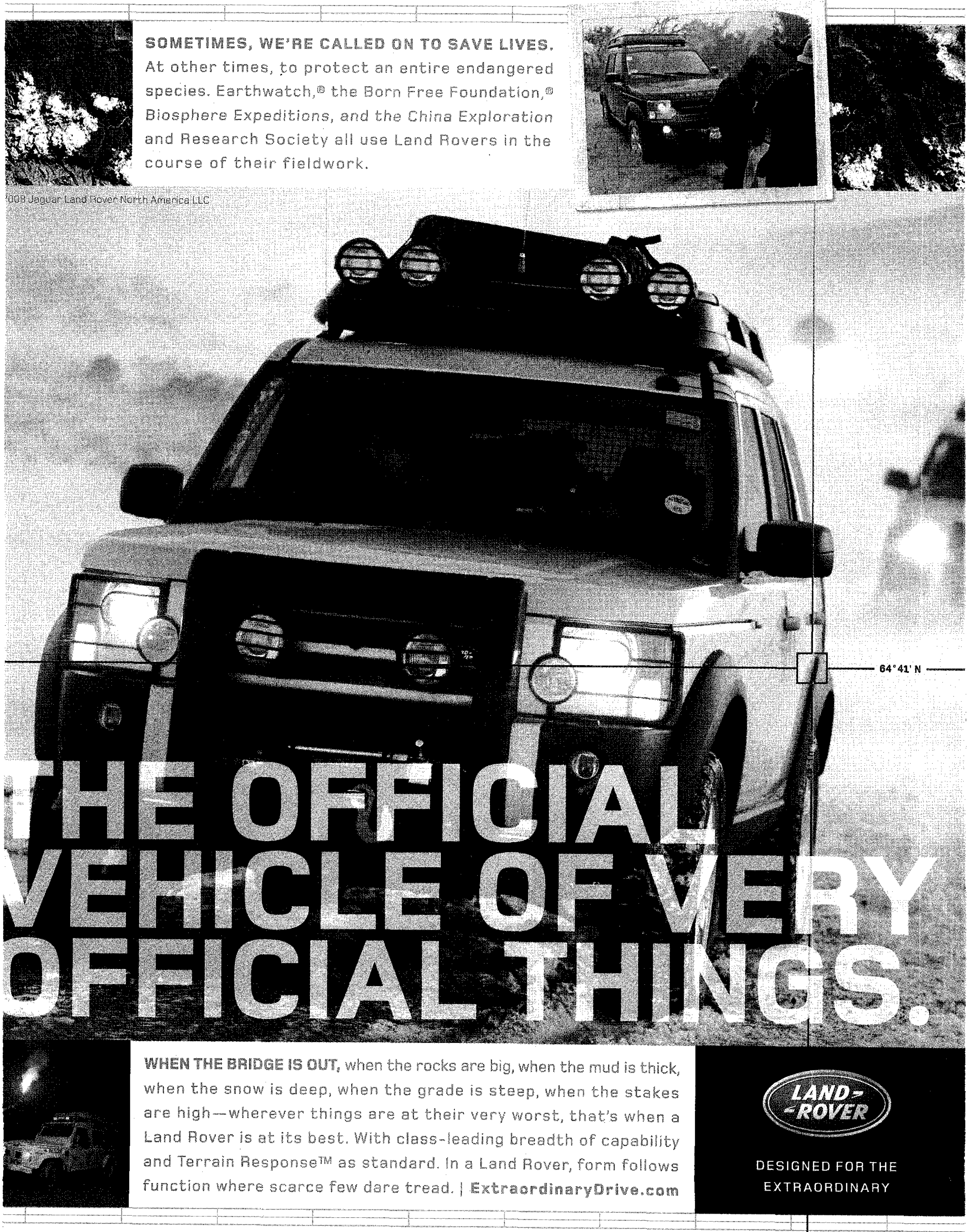
CLASSICAL MUSIC
THE SHOW GOES ON

James Levine may be out of action for the rest of the summer, but Tanglewood soldiers on without him. This week, Andrew Davis conducts what should be a commanding performance of "Eugene Onegin," featuring Renée Fleming, Ramón Vargas, and Peter Mattei. (See page 15.)

MOVIES
DOUBLE TROUBLE

A month before the release of their new comic thriller, "Burn After Reading," the Coen brothers, Joel and Ethan, are the subject of a MOMA mini-retrospective of nine of their films, from the first, "Blood Simple," to last year's Oscar-winning "No Country for Old Men." (See page 20.)

The Perlman Music Program, on Shelter Island. Photograph by Yola Monakhov.



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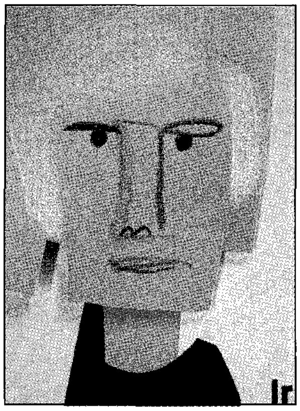


LAURIE ROSENWALD

While some classical record labels have lost artistic focus or disappeared altogether amid crises in the music business, boutique operations like Nonesuch, ECM, Harmonia Mundi, and BIS have gone from strength to strength, with each new release extending a personal vision. New Albion, which was founded in Northern California twenty-four years ago by Foster Reed, is among the most distinctive. A laid-back West Coast vibe has characterized many of New Albion's offerings, although its most celebrated recording, of Morton Feldman's haunting "Rothko Chapel," honors a New York modernist. From Aug. 1 to Aug. 10, at the Spiegeltent at Bard College, New Albion will curate a series of live performances: "Rothko Chapel" appears on the first program, and Pauline Oliveros, the composer, electronic-music pioneer, and accordionist, closes the series. Bard also presents an exceedingly rare production of Karol Szymanowski's sensual, mystical 1926 opera, "King Roger"; the last performance is on Aug. 3.

—*Alex Ross*

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ANIMALS OUT OF PAPER
Second Stage's Uptown Series concludes with this play by Rajiv Joseph, an origami-themed love story. Giovanna Sardelli directs. In previews. Opens Aug. 4. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 212-246-4422.)

BUFFALO GAL
Primary Stages opens its season with this play by A. R. Gurney, a comedy about a fading television star who returns to her home town, Buffalo, to perform in "The Cherry Orchard." Mark Lamos directs. In previews. Opens Aug. 5. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

FELA!
Bill T. Jones directs and choreographs a new musical about the Nigerian composer, performer, and political activist Fela Anikulapo Kuti. With a book by Jim Lewis and Jones, and additional lyrics by Lewis. Kuti's music will be performed by Antibalas. Previews begin Aug. 5. (37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-560-8912.)

THE FIRST BREEZE OF SUMMER
Signature Theatre Company presents Leslie Lee's drama from 1975, about three generations of a Southern family. Ruben Santiago-Hudson directs; Leslie Uggams stars. Previews begin Aug. 5. (555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

FLAMINGO COURT
Jamie Farr and Anita Gillette star in this comedy by Luigi Creatore, about the residents of a South Florida condo complex. Steven Yuhasz directs. In previews. Opens July 31. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE ROCK MUSICAL
Diane Paulus directs a cast of twenty-seven, led by Jonathan Groff ("Spring Awakening") and Will Swenson. In previews. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park, near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-539-8750.)

SUMMER SHORTS 2
The festival of new American one-act plays includes works by Terrence McNally and Eduardo Machado. Opens July 31. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

NOW PLAYING

AIN'T SUPPOSED TO DIE A NATURAL DEATH
Classical Theatre of Harlem presents Melvin Van Peebles's 1971 musical, about life in the ghetto, performed in various parks throughout the city. (July 29-Aug. 2: Marcus Garvey Park, Madison Ave. at 123rd St. For information, visit www.classicaltheatreofharlem.org.)

AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS
Irish Rep and the Cincinnati Playhouse present Mark Brown's stage adaptation of the Jules Verne novel, set in 1872, about a British man who travels the globe to win a bet. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

GIVE 'EM HELL, HARRY!
Bix Barnaba stars as Harry S. Truman in Samuel Gallu's play about the thirty-third President. Stan Mazin directs. (St. Luke's, 308 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200.)

KICKING A DEAD HORSE
In Sam Shepard's latest play (under the playwright's direction), Hobart Struther (the apt Stephen Rea) is trying to dig a grave for a fallen horse. He's stuck alone in the badlands, home to rattlesnakes, coyotes, and death. What is Hobart—who, as it turns out, works in Manhattan, as an art dealer—doing here? He is on a quest, he tells us, if only indirectly. Rea has no trouble making us see that, whatever the action onstage, Hobart's consciousness—his frustrated hopes, his befuddlement—is the real drama. With this play, which contains some of the most poetic and metaphysical writing Shepard has produced since the seventies, the playwright reconfigures himself—a Midwestern boy who dreamed of a West that no longer exists, if it ever existed—as a man who dreamed of a different kind of life for himself, before ending up lost in the brush, another gone critter in the sad purple light. (Reviewed in our issue of 7/28/08.) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

MARIE ANTOINETTE: THE COLOR OF FLESH
Joel Gross wrote this fictionalized story about a love triangle involving Marie Antoinette, her portrait painter Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, and Count Alexis de Ligne. Robert Kalfin directs. (St. Luke's, 308 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE MARRIAGE OF BETTE AND BOO
Christopher Durang's 1985 play (in a Roundabout Theatre Company revival, at the Laura Pels) is divided into thirty-three pointed scenes, following the marriage of Bette Brennan (Kate Jennings Grant) and Boo Hudlocke (the understated Christopher Evan Welch). From the moment we're introduced to the couple, on their wedding day, we're aware of Bette's strained will and Boo's sad resignation. In the years following their wedding, Bette and Boo have a child, Matt (Charles Socarides), who announces the titles of the scenes and sometimes amusingly narrates what the characters are doing in the pauses between them. Grant and Welch couldn't be more grating, or more touching, which is as it should be. But Walter Bobbie's direction of the supporting cast is strange: rather than look for the emotion beneath Durang's absurdism, he has his actors competing to accentuate the ridiculousness. (7/28/08) (111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

SOME AMERICANS ABROAD
A mysterious air of anxiety pervades the Second Stage revival of Richard Nelson's 1989 comedy, about a group of professors and students on a theatregoing tour of England. There are a few conflicts and a few secrets; meals are eaten, Shakespeare watched and discussed, scandals narrowly averted. But the show's satire of Anglophilia, pomposity, and amorality among academics isn't as edgy as it once was, and one begins to suspect that the actors are trying to generate drama that the script lacks. Though Tom Cavanagh makes an unconvincing department head, Anthony Rapp fares well, as a young professor who's worried about his job. John Cunningham delights in a small role, as a wine-swilling retired professor, as does Todd Weeks, as a tourist of the ugly-American variety. (307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. Through Aug. 3.)

STAIN
Tony Glazer wrote this dark comedy, about the life and relationships of a fifteen-year-old boy. Scott C. Embler directs. (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE STRANGERER
The Chicago-based troupe Theatre Oobleck brings its 2007 hit to New York for a limited Off Broadway run. Inspired by the appearance of Albert Camus's "The Stranger" on George W. Bush's 2006 summer-reading list, the playwright Mickle Maher reimagines the first Bush-Kerry debate (Maher also plays John Kerry) as one in which the President (Guy Massey) is plagued by the meaninglessness of existence and the question of how exactly to kill Jim Lehrer (Brian Shaw). It's a bizarre, ambitious, and often funny spectacle that calls to mind the nuttier works of Ionesco, but it suffers from a lack of focus. Despite riveting performances by the three lead actors, the show never quite finds the right balance of parody, philosophy, and metatheatrics. (Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200.)

TWELVE OPHELIAS
A good reason to see this production of Caridad Svich's elliptical retelling of "Hamlet" is the chance to admire the setting—McCarren Park Pool—before it's transformed from a cultural venue back into an actual swimming pool. At the center of the sprawling plateau of graffiti-covered concrete, underneath a vast, beautiful darkening sky, Ophelia emerges from a pond into some sort of Appalachian alternate universe, where Gertrude runs a brothel, Hamlet wears a wife-beater, and everyone speaks with their own take on a Tennessee

accent. The team of young actors are promising, but their brave attempts are thwarted by a combination of bad sound design and a thin yet overwrought script—no match for the drama of their surroundings. (Lorimer St. at Bayard St., Brooklyn. Tickets, which are free, may be reserved at www.theatermania.com.)

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU HATE ALL YOUR FRIENDS
Four Chairs Theatre Company presents the première of Larry Kunofsky's comedy, about a misanthropic man who becomes involved with a woman who runs a secret club. Jacob Krueger directs. (Lion, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

OUT OF TOWN

BARD SUMMERSCAPE
The Spiegeltent continues its run, and, beginning Aug. 1, Will Pomerantz directs and choreographs the George and Ira Gershwin musical "Of Thee I Sing," which has a book by George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind. James Bagwell conducts. (Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900.)

BAY STREET THEATRE
"Ain't Misbehavin'," the Fats Waller musical revue by Murray Horwitz and Richard Maltby, Jr., begins performances Aug. 5. Marcia Milgrom Dodge directs. For more information, visit www.baystreet.org. (Sag Harbor, N.Y. 631-725-9500.)

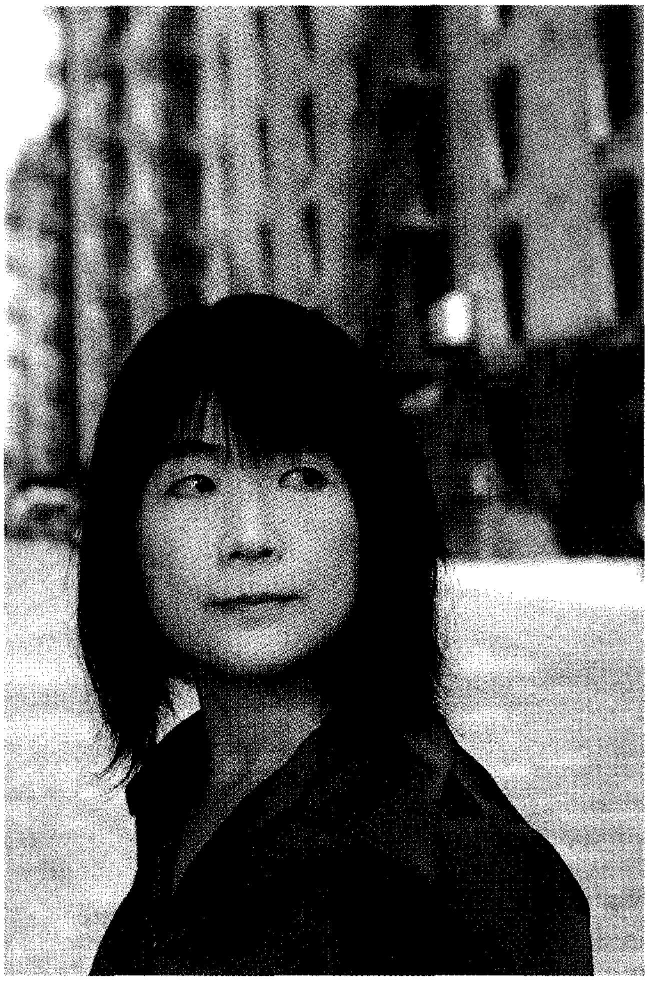
BERKSHIRE THEATRE FESTIVAL
At the Unicorn, Anders Cato directs Beckett's 1953 masterwork, "Waiting for Godot." On the Main Stage, Richard Corley directs "A Man for All Seasons," Robert Bolt's drama about Sir Thomas More. For more information, visit www.berkshiretheatre.org. (Stockbridge, Mass. 413-298-5576.)

HUDSON VALLEY SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
"Cymbeline," directed by Terrence O'Brien, plays on the tented outdoor stage at Boscobel, in repertory with "Twelfth Night" and "The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)." For more information, visit www.hvshakespeare.org. (Garrison, N.Y. 845-265-9575.)

WILLIAMSTOWN THEATRE FESTIVAL
On the Nikos Stage, Scott Ellis directs the world première of Theresa Rebeck's comedy "The Understudy," starring Kristen Johnston, Bradley Cooper, and Reg Rogers, through Aug. 3. On the Main Stage, John Rando directs George Feydeau's farce "A Flea in Her Ear," rewritten by David Ives. For a full festival schedule, visit www.wtfestival.org. (Williamstown, Mass. 413-597-3400.)

Also Playing

ARIAS WITH A TWIST: HERE Arts Center, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BOEING-BOEING:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **A CHORUS LINE:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **CIRQUE DREAMS "JUNGLE FANTASY":** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **EAST 14TH:** New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **GYPSY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **LEGALLY BLONDE THE MUSICAL:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100. **LIFE IN A MARITAL INSTITUTION:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **PERFECT HARMONY:** Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **THURGOOD:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **[TITLE OF SHOW]:** Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100. **XANADU:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.



Asako Narahashi is exhibiting her photographs at Milo.

ELENA DORFMAN

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Aug. 1: A night of accessible, poppy reggae with **Maxi Priest.** Aug. 2: **Russell Thompkins, Jr.,** and the **New Stylistics.** The falsetto was rarely so cool as when Thompkins employed it as the lead singer of the Stylistics, sending "You Are Everything," "Betcha by Golly, Wow," "You Make Me Feel Brand New," and other suave songs up the charts in the early seventies. Aug. 4: The rock-and-roll survivor **Leon Russell.** Aug. 5: **Eddy Grant** will always be a one-hit wonder here in the States, thanks to his 1983 single "Electric Avenue," but, overseas, the Guyana-born, London-bred artist has had a long and innovative career. He started in the sixties, fronting the Equals (whose "Police on My Back" was later covered memorably by the Clash), and went on to greatness in both pop and reggae.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—July 30: **Tilly and the Wall,** five freethinking musicians out of Omaha, have a snappy sixties sound that's a tiny bit unlike anything else out there; a tap dancer, not a drummer, keeps the beat. Aug. 1: **We Are Scientists** are a pair of wisecracking kids who play danceable, guitar-based rock. The experimental synthesizer-tweakers of **Oxford Collapse** open. Aug. 2: The rootsy San Francisco band **Vetiver** often gets thrown in with the freak-folk movement, since its front man, Andy Cabic, is a friend of Devendra Banhart's. But, while Banhart is interested in exploding folk forms, Cabic wants to preserve them. Nowhere is this more apparent than on Vetiver's moving new album, "Thing of the Past," a collection of obscure old tunes that the group plays straight and respectfully, which is not to say without great pleasure.

CELEBRATE BROOKLYN!
Prospect Park Band Shell, Prospect Park W. at 9th St. (718-855-7882, ext. 45)—Aug. 2: A concert honoring the legacy of the children's-book author Ezra Jack Keats (1916-83), a native of Brooklyn, whose book "The Snowy Day" received a Caldecott Award in 1963. **Father Goose,** a reggae singer and a cohort of Dan Zanes, will be joined by the **Sippy Cups,** a San Francisco group with a psychedelic sound, and the singer-songwriter **Joan Osborne. Sonia Manzano,** who plays Maria on "Sesame Street," and the actor **James McDaniel** will read Keats stories between sets. Aug. 3: A festival of African guitar music with Zimbabwe's **Oliver Mtukudzi,** Mali's **Habib Koité & Bamada, Daby Touré,** and others.

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. (212-360-2777)—Aug. 3: The soulful sounds of **Jamie Lidell.** With **Janelle Monáe, José James,** and **Little Jackie.** Aug. 4: The local heroes in the indie-rock band the **National** perform a benefit concert for SummerStage.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—July 30: The singer-songwriter **Aimee Mann.** July 31: Underground rap with the **Hieroglyphics.**

JONES BEACH THEATRE
Wantagh, N.Y. (212-307-7171)—July 30: A big-haired triumvirate of eighties heavy metal with **Poison, Dokken,** and the former Skid Row front man **Sebastian Bach.** July 31-Aug. 1: The earnest nineties balladeers **Counting Crows** and the comparative upstarts of **Maroon 5** deliver harmless, middle-of-the-road rock.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3132)—July 30: **Ariel Pink's Haunted Graffiti.** Ariel Pink (né Ariel Rosenberg) is a multitracking recording artist from Los Angeles who crafts left-of-center pop pastiches that sound like transmissions from an undiscovered corner of the universe. Early on, he played nearly all the instruments on his albums himself (creating the drum and percussion sounds with his mouth), toiling in relative obscurity. In recent years, he's developed a cult following in his home town and has garnered the support of Animal Collective, Brooklyn's hip purveyors of whacked-out pop, which has brought a new level of success. He's now backed by an actual band, and it's a sharp one at that.

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG
66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn (718-486-5400)—July 30: **Bon Iver** is Justin Vernon, a Wisconsin-based singer-songwriter with a gritty falsetto and a cool catalogue of soulful folk songs. July 31: **We Are Scientists** (see the Bowery Ballroom). Aug. 1: **Aimee Mann** (see the Highline Ballroom). Aug. 3: **Vetiver** (see the Bowery Ballroom).

RIVER TO RIVER FESTIVAL
July 30: **Patti Austin** puts her spin on the George and Ira Gershwin songbook. (Rockefeller Park.)

July 31: The fresh and timeless power pop of the **Long Winters.** The songwriter John Roderick, who grew up in Anchorage, Alaska, leads the band, which has included, at various times, esteemed members of the current Seattle rock scene. (Castle Clinton, Battery Park. For more information about both shows, visit www.rivertorivernyc.com.)

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—July 30: England's **Supergrass** is a surprisingly long-lasting ensemble with roots in the Brit-pop era of the mid-nineties. Renowned for cheeky swagger and a youthful exuberance, it has a penchant for catchy and punky garage pop. The band's latest album, "Diamond Hoo Ha," doesn't mess with the winning formula. Aug. 1: The **Old 97's** came out of Dallas in the early nineties and set themselves apart from the era's thundering crowd of alt-country bands with a mixture of Raymond Carver references, the high lonesome, and a bar band's feistiness. Their fine new record is called "Blame It on Gravity."

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—July 29-Aug. 3: A gathering of smooth-jazz and fusion players, as the guitarist **Chuck Loeb** is joined by the drummer **Dave Weckl,** the bassist **Gerald Veasley,** and the trumpeter **Randy Brecker.**

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. (212-360-2777)—Aug. 2: **Roy Hargrove** made his name as a furiously adept neo-hard-bop trumpeter, but he has broad musical interests, embracing hip-hop, funk, and Latin elements. Expect the big band he's leading here to do the same.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—July 29-Aug. 3: The pianist **Cedar Walton** is a masterly leader, and he has a charging horn soloist, the saxophonist **Vincent Herring,** and a crack rhythm team that includes the drummer **Lewis Nash.** Dependable contemporary hard bop is virtually guaranteed.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—July 30: **Endangered Species.** A number of impressive guests, both veteran players and younger luminaries, join David Weiss's Wayne Shorter tribute big band. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

"JAZZ IN JULY"
July 30: The pianist **George Shearing** is fêted in style by the pianist **Renee Rosnes** and the vocalist **Freddy Cole,** and by a quintet featuring **Bill Charlap, Joe Locke,** and **Peter Bernstein,** which revives the trademark piano-vibes-and-guitar sound of Shearing's popular small groups of the fifties. July 31: A tribute to the composer and arranger Billy Strayhorn, the behind-the-scenes genius who helped fashion Duke Ellington's musical world. The ensemble here includes the pianists **Bill Charlap** and **Mulgrew Miller,** the saxophonist **Frank Wess,** and the singer **Carol Sloane.** (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—July 29-30: The drummer **Ali Jackson, Jr.,** a mainstay of the Wynton Marsalis band, gives classic R. & B. material an acoustic-jazz slant on his new album, "Wheelz Keep Rollin'." He's here with a sextet in celebration of its release. July 31-Aug. 3: The new-jazz pianist and composer **Vijay Iyer's** quartet has a new album, "Tragicomic," which displays the intuitive relationship between the inventive leader and his scene-stealing saxophonist, **Rudresh Mahanthappa.**

ROSE THEATRE
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—July 30: An international contingent of players, including the violinist **Regina Carter** and the guitarists **Bucky Pizzarelli, Howard Alden,** and **Dorado Schmitt,** celebrate the Gypsy jazz of the violinist Stéphane Grappelli and the guitarist Django Reinhardt.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—July 29-Aug. 3: The drummer **Paul Motian** is a bandleader of extremes. His trios are bare-bones affairs that often do without a bassist; his larger groups burst with guitarists, bassists, and horn players. His octet here ups the ante with the addition of **Mat Maneri,** on viola. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"J.M.W. Turner."** Through Sept. 1. ♦ **"Art of the Royal Court: Treasures in Pietre Dure from the Palaces of Europe."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Superheroes: Fashion and Fantasy."** Through Sept. 1. ♦ **"Medieval and Renaissance Treasures from the Victoria and Albert Museum."** Through Aug. 17. ♦ **"Framing a Century: Master Photographs, 1840-1940."** Through Sept. 1. ♦ **"Jeff Koons on the Roof."** Through Oct. 26. ♦ **"Early Buddhist Manuscript Painting: The Palm-Leaf Tradition."** Through March 22, 2009. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Dalí: Painting and Film."** Through Sept. 15. ♦ **"Bernd and Hilla Becher: Landscape/Topology."** Through Aug. 25. ♦ **"Home Delivery: Fabricating the Modern Dwelling."** Through Oct. 20. ♦ **"Kirchner and the Berlin Street."** Opens Aug. 3. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Louise Bourgeois."** Through Sept. 28. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—At the age of thirty-two, after a string of devastating personal and professional crises, Buckminster Fuller decided to devote himself to improving the lot of humankind, via design, architecture, invention, and philosophy. He described himself as a "comprehensive anticipatory design scientist," a catchall phrase that still doesn't convey the breadth of the project that the utopian polymath set for himself during the next five decades. **"Buckminster Fuller: Starting with the Universe"** documents his fantastically eclectic career, in plans for floating cities, models of geodesic domes, and photographs of him performing in a play at Black Mountain College in the forties. The only surviving prototype of his Dymaxion car may be of particular interest these days: the submarine-shaped vehicle, which carried eleven passengers, could go a hundred and twenty miles per hour and got up to thirty miles per gallon. Looking at all this, one is amazed that Fuller could limit a 1975 lecture series titled "Everything I Know" to just forty-two hours. Through Sept. 21. ♦ After the orderly Fuller show, **"Paul McCarthy: Central Symmetrical Rotation Movement Three Installations, Two Films"** comes on like gangbusters, a riot of flashing lights, slamming doors, and spinning images. "Bang Bang Room" (1992) is a mechanized eight-foot wooden cube, whose walls pivot out from the corners while doors on each side open and close with violent force. "Spinning Room" (1970/2008) uses rapidly rotating cameras to collect images of visitors, then projects them around the room in a dizzying whirl of light. The disorientation continues with a mirrored wall, which reflects the whole exhibition, leaving one feeling everywhere and nowhere at once. Through Oct. 12. ♦ **"Polaroids: Mapplethorpe."** Through Sept. 7. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

POP NOTES
BLAST FROM THE PRESENT

Richie Havens and Joan Baez aren't much older than the senior class of classic rockers—they're both sixty-seven, the same age as Bob Dylan, the same age that John Lennon would be. But, in the popular imagination, they're forever fixed in an earlier time: Havens in August, 1969, when he opened Woodstock with the driving "Freedom," and Baez in the civil-rights era, singing "Farewell, Angelina" (or possibly in 1975, singing "Diamonds and Rust"). But both artists have stayed the course, continuing to record and perform politically committed material and to stretch themselves as interpretive singers.

"Nobody Left to Crown" (Verve Forecast), Havens's first recording in four years, opens with a pair of originals, "The Key" and "Say It Isn't So," which manage to address spiritual themes without sounding overly earnest, a trick that sometimes eluded the artist in his younger years. The centerpiece of the album is a majestic cover of "Won't Get Fooled Again." Over his trademark open-tuned strumming, Havens delivers a commanding vocal performance that fully restores the revolutionary impulse of The Who's original; he somehow gets blood from a song that has been ossified for years. Nothing else quite rises to that level, though there's an urgent version of Jackson Browne's "Lives in the Balance" and several strong tracks in which Haven applies Eastern-style enlightenment to Realpolitik—including the quietly furious title song, which slyly quotes "Home on the Range."

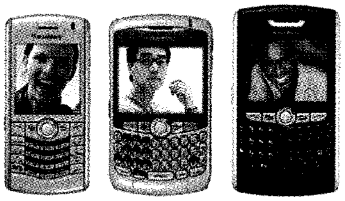
Baez's **"Day After Tomorrow"** (Razor & Tie) was produced by Steve Earle, who keeps Baez focussed on the Americana and the contemporary country of her last album, "Dark Chords from a Big Guitar." The title track, a soldier's monologue written by Tom Waits, verges on the maudlin, but for most of the record Baez uses her distinctive voice—older, more worn, and ultimately more gratifying than the strident soprano with which she once attacked gospel standards and protest songs—to give the material emotional depth. The arrangements are all fairly spare and the lyrics richly Biblical, most intensely on Earle's "Jericho Road," which is stripped down to vocals and handclaps and ends the record on a haunting, oracular note.

—Ben Greenman

JOHN RITTER

Life On BlackBerry

BlackBerry



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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
RUSSIAN ARC

Although the reputation of Andrei Tarkovsky, twenty-two years after his death, remains secure, his admirers are understandably divided. For every viewer who rejoices in the historical glories of "Andrei Rublev," there is another who will veer toward the apocalyptic grandeur of his later works, like "The Sacrifice." Perched quietly in the middle of Tarkovsky's career, however, is his purest and most private achievement, "The Mirror" (1975), which screens at Anthology Film Archives on Aug. 2. With its interleaved fragments of childhood and later life, switches in texture and color, and competing elemental outbursts of water and fire, the result should by rights be impenetrable; likewise, the fact that the narrator's mother and wife are played by the same actress (Margarita Terekhova) seems at once bewildering and entirely apt. The smallest details (a stammering child, the wrinkle in the turned page of a book) stick like burrs, and we are left to wonder if any director has delved with more modesty and honesty into the heartbreak of the past.

—*Anthony Lane*

KINO INTERNATIONAL

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Ghada Amer: Love Has No End."** Through Oct. 19. ♦ **"Click! A Crowd-Curated Exhibition."** Through Aug. 10. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"The Horse."** Through Jan. 4, 2009. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Ardeshir Mohassess: Art and Satire in Iran."** Through Aug. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS
1040 Grand Concourse (718-681-6000)—**"How Soon Is Now?"** Participants in the museum's 2008 Artists in the Marketplace program exhibit their work. Through Aug. 18. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Frick's Vermeers Reunited."** Through Nov. 2. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Heavy Light: Recent Photography and Video from Japan."** Through Sept. 7. ♦ **"Bill Wood's Business."** Through Sept. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Action/Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Warhol's Jews: Ten Portraits Reconsidered."** Through Aug. 13. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Philip Guston: Works on Paper."** Through Aug. 31. ♦ **"Illuminating the Medieval Hunt."** Through Aug. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"The 183rd Annual."** Through Sept. 7. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"After Nature."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Altoids Award: Ei Arakawa, Lauren Kelley, Michael Patterson-Carver, and Michael Stickrod."** Through Oct. 12. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—**"If Elected: The Game of American Politics."** Through Jan. 6, 2009. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Olafur Eliasson."** Through Aug. 31. ♦ **"Arctic Hysteria: New Art from Finland."** Through Sept. 15. ♦ **"Public Farm One"** transforms the museum's austere courtyard into a working organic garden installed on an undulating terrace of recyclable cardboard barrels. Through Sept. 8. ♦ **"James Turrell's Meeting."** The artist's "skyspace" installation will be open at sunset on Saturdays. Through Sept. 6. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Kehinde Wiley—The World Stage: Africa, Lagos ~ Dakar."** Through Oct. 26. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

LARRY FINK
Fink, whose photographs typically involve the keen observation of small-scale social interactions, goes large with a series shot for *Vanity Fair* during the final months of the Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama primary campaigns. His results include a number of very good images of the candidates in action and even more interesting behind-the-scenes views of the people drawn into their orbit, including staffers, Secret Service personnel, and fellow-citizens. Still, star power is hard to resist, and, in the best picture here, Obama gestures gracefully but forcefully at the edge of a roiling crowd, his poise thrown into relief by the frenzy. Through Aug. 15. (Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999.)

"SUMMER SELECTIONS"
The critic Clement Greenberg didn't join in the love affair with Pop art; instead he championed Post-Painterly Abstraction (a phrase he coined), and, in 1964, he curated an exhibition on the subject, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. A few of Greenberg's darlings are included here (without, it should be noted, any reference to the critic himself): Morris Louis is represented by a stark arrangement of vertical pours on canvas; Kenneth Noland by a chevron-shaped painting of hard-edged stripes; and Helen Frankenthaler by a painting from 1961, graced with her signature stains. Robert Motherwell and Howard Hodgkin serve as bookends, with abstract works made circa 1960 and in the early eighties, respectively. Through Sept. 10. (Ameringer-Yohe, 20 W. 57th St. 212-445-0051.)

Short List

EDWARD HOPPER: Starr, 5 E. 73rd St. 212-570-1739. Through Aug. 15. **JESS:** De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-262-5050. Through July 31. **CATHERINE MURPHY:** Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 212-794-0550. Through Aug. 1. **"DEEP COMEDY":** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through July 30. **"QUIET POLITICS":** Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677. Through Aug. 29.

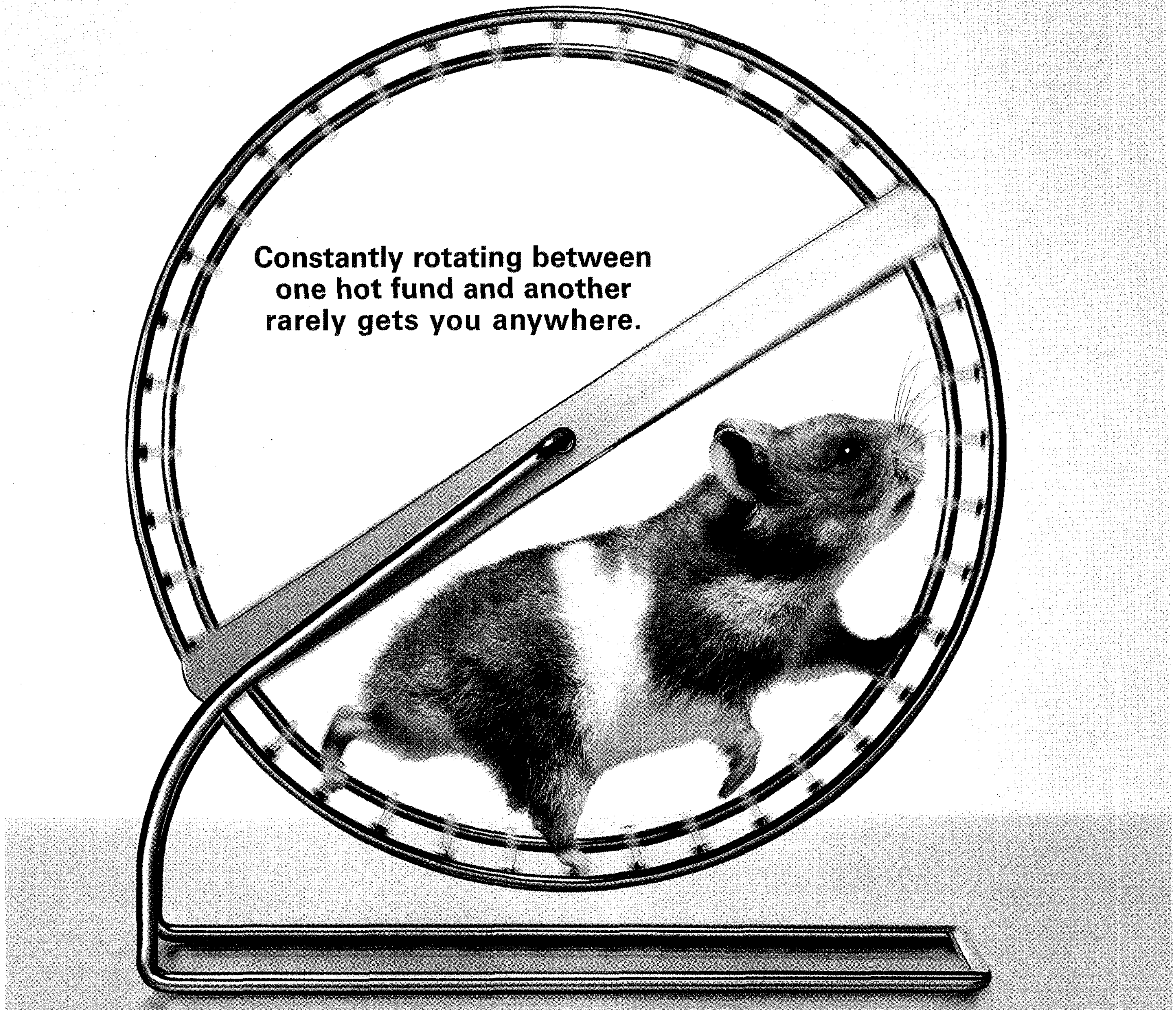
GALLERIES—CHELSEA

BILL OWENS
Owens, who is best known for his photographs of suburban California in the nineteen-seventies, has the instincts of a newsman and the sensibility of a short-story writer. His subjects are primarily working-class men and women—a cocktail waitress, a crab fisherman, a car salesman—many of whom comment on their jobs in the pictures' titles. The narratives suggested by these images ground a strong but scattered show that includes more recent color work and photographs of Vietnam-era antiwar protests, which retain their power to rile. But none can compete with Owens's shot of a pretty little blond girl squinting at the camera and holding a toy gun. Through Aug. 1. (Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500.)

"HISTORY KEEPS ME AWAKE AT NIGHT"
David Wojnarowicz has, since his death, from AIDS, in 1992, been cherished as a patron saint of sexual confession, political rage, and literary grace. Here, eighteen artists consider his influence, while winking at other wastrel aesthetes and queer martyrs. Emily Roysdon's black-and-white photographs depict folks-about-town wearing paper masks of Wojnarowicz's face (he once staged a similar stunt using Rimbaud's). In Frédéric Moffet's film, people on the street read Genet aloud. Keith Mayerson's painting memorializes Matthew Shepard, and the duo Lovett/Codagnone projects a text by Pasolini onto the back of a black leather jacket—in purple light, of course. With works by Carrie Mae Weems, Wolfgang Tillmans, and Shannon Ebner, among others. Through Aug. 22. (P.P.O.W., 555 W. 25th St. 212-647-1044.)

"IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT"
Ah, the mystical North, land of geysers, faeries, and depressives. These myths are lovingly mocked in a survey of works by nine Icelandic artists. Birgir Andrésson assembles a grid of texts and photographs memorializing gnarled-looking vagrants.

Simple Truth: Performance-chasing is a losing strategy



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Haraldur Jónsson's "Crumpled Darkness" is a lava-like pile of balled-up black paper, and Katrín Sigurdardóttir's glacial-landscape sculpture is viewed by climbing a ladder and sticking one's head in a box. Ragnar Kjartansson sends things over the top with "God," a video of a cherubic crooner (the artist himself)—"Sorrow conquers happiness," he sings—backed by an easy-listening orchestra in a chamber hung with Shocking-pink satin curtains. Through Aug. 8. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100.)

"OF THE REFRAIN"
The curator Phil Taylor (who also mans the gallery's desk) installed this exhibition of primarily modernist photographs as if the works were notes on a musical score. The results are unexpected, inspired, and full of telling juxtapositions between figuration and abstraction. Dance is a recurring motif, and bodies in motion (by Barbara Morgan, Lotte Jacobi, Ellen Auerbach, and the little-known Black Mountain artist Hazel Larsen Archer) spark some of the show's most sustained passages. With terrific pictures by Berenice Abbott, Man Ray, Ilse Bing, and the team of Ringl + Pit, the visual music here is decidedly avant-garde—jagged, edgy, and unexpected. Through Aug. 22. (Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 24th St. 212-989-7600.)

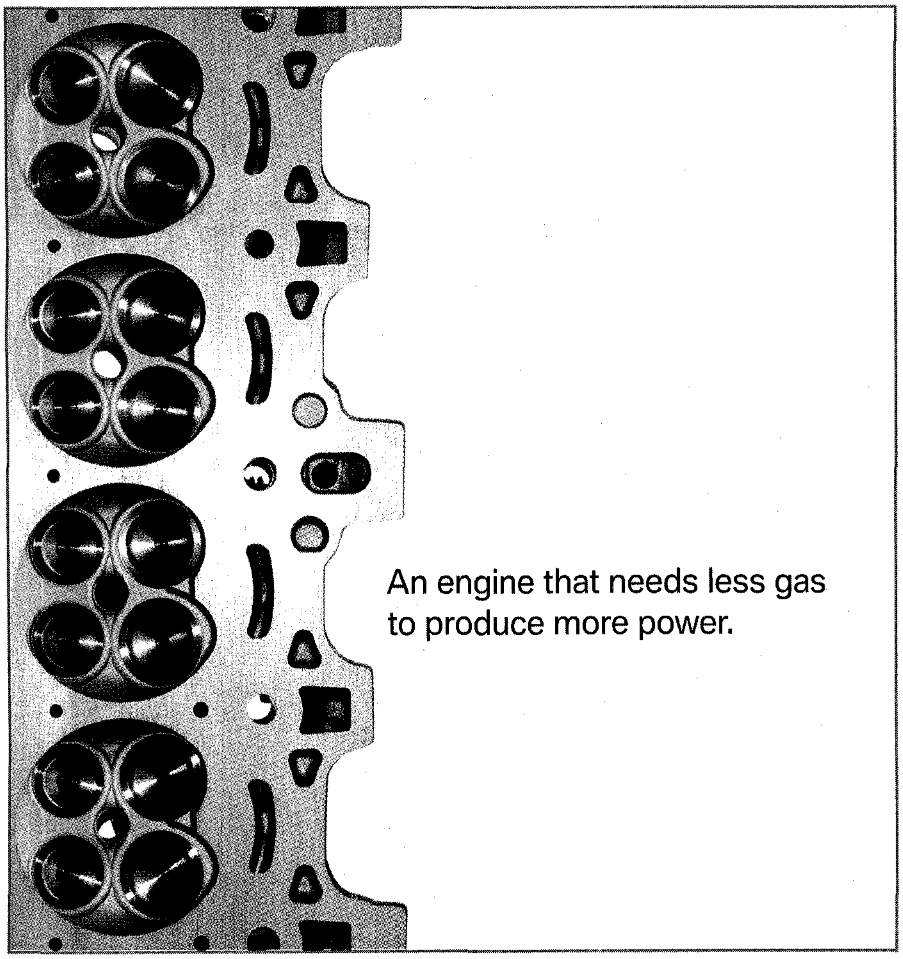
"WEST NILE STYLE"
Somewhere in the wilds of Williamsburg lurks an artists' collective and performance space known as Paris London/West Nile, whose members produce paintings, sculptures, installations, and videos, as well as noisemaking devices. The protean experimental filmmaker and composer Tony Conrad contributes drawings (on tablecloths) to this group show, which has a bright spirit despite a too-familiar communal-junk aesthetic. The most resolved works are metal-and-leather sculptures by an artist called Cat Chow; the most entertaining are books that Brooke Hamre Gillespie has transformed into electronic instruments, which visitors are welcome to play. Through Aug. 15. (D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-352-9460.)

Short List

HARRY DODGE AND STANYA KAHN: Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545. Through Aug. 2. **TETSUMI KUDO:** Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000. Through Aug. 15. **ASAKO NARAHASHI:** Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370. Through Aug. 22. **"THE GOOD LIFE":** Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610. Through Aug. 22. **"IDLE YOUTH":** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Aug. 15. **"NOT SO SUBTLE SUBTITLE":** Kaplan, 525 W. 21st St. 212-645-7335. Through Aug. 1. **"PAINTING NOW AND FOREVER, PART II":** Greene Naftali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770; Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0020. Through Aug. 15. **"THIS IS NOT ABOUT LANDSCAPE":** Bailey, 511 W. 25th St. 212-989-0156. Through Aug. 8.

GALLERIES—QUEENS

ASSUME VIVID ASTRO FOCUS
The shifting collaborative known as A.V.A.F.—renamed Absolutely Venomous Accurately Fallacious (Naturally Delicious), for the purposes of this show—has commandeered the Deitch gallery's new warehouse in Long Island City and transformed it into a zone for raving happenings of every stripe. The façade of the building is painted with a psychedelic mural and the cavernous interior is festooned with giant photographs, paint splatters, plastic supermarket flags, streamers, neon sculptures, scrappy constructions, and an enormous transgender mannequin splayed face down. In other words, it's done up in the diverting but predictable House of Deitch style. Through Aug. 10. (4-40 44th Dr. 212-343-7300.)



DANCE

BATTLEWORKS DANCE COMPANY
Robert Battle's new "Reel Time" has a tribal intensity, part African and part rocking out. "Ella" is a tour-de-force solo, as is "In/Side." Other pieces on the program include "Juba," created for the Ailey company, and "Overture," set to Bach. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. July 29 at 7:30, July 31 at 8, and Aug. 2 at 2 and 8.)

KEIGWIN + COMPANY
The company makes its Joyce début with "Elements," in which Larry Keigwin's uncommon imagination explores earth, fire, air, and water, to music ranging from Mozart and Chopin to Patsy Cline and Devo. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. July 30 at 2 and 7:30 and Aug. 1 at 8.)

NOCHE FLAMENCA
The traditional flamenco company and its extraordinary star, Soledad Barrio, return to Theatre 80. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-352-3101. July 30-Aug. 1 at 8, Aug. 2 at 2 and 8, and Aug. 3 at 2. Through Aug. 14.)

CAMERINO 4
Each summer since 2002, Queens Theatre in the Park has commissioned a new dance piece, often bringing in Latin-American troupes that don't normally make it to New York. The idea is praiseworthy; the results hit and miss. This year's selection, Camerino 4, making its United States début, hails from Mexico and traffics in the theatre of the absurd. (Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. 718-760-0064. July 30 at 8; LaGuardia Performing Arts Center, 31-10 Thomson Ave., Long Island City. 718-482-5151. July 31 at 8.)

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP
In a free concert for Celebrate Brooklyn!, the Brooklyn-based company presents a New York première set to Samuel Barber's "Excursions," one of the composer's ventures into Americana, a suite of piano bagatelles complete with hoedown and blues elements. Also on the program are Morris's companion pieces to Brahms songs: "New Love Song Waltzes" (1982), aching and vulnerable, with partner swapping, and "Love Song Waltzes" (1988), friendly and communal. The music, as always, is live. (Prospect Park Band Shell, Prospect Park W. at 9th St. 718-855-7882. July 31 at 8.)

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
The free outdoor concert series goes Afro-Latin, with a double bill. Mostly male, bare-chested, and acrobatic, the members of DanceBrazil perform "Ritmos," an homage to capoeira, the martial-arts form that's at the heart of most of the company's repertory. The dancers in Max Pollak's virtuosic troupe RumbaTap let pulsing, tricky Afro-Cuban (and sometimes Bulgarian) rhythms take over their bodies and tap shoes. For this show, the company band of saxophones, marimba, and singers is augmented by the Paul Carlon Octet, acing an original and a Tito Puente arrangement. (Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. 212-360-2777. Aug. 1 at 8.)

MONICA BILL BARNES
Barnes's sharp-witted, bighearted postmodern dance theatre can be by turns deliciously funny, obvious, or irritating, and then, all of a sudden, poignant or even hopelessly bleak. Her pieces tend to be uneven but are never without surprises, born of juxtapositions of style, touchingly retro costumes, and unexpected musical choices. In "Game Face," Barnes and seven collaborators take on the business world, in a work commissioned by Sitelines. (Robert Wagner, Jr., Park, just north of Battery Park. 212-219-9401. Aug. 4-5 at noon and 1. Through Aug. 14.)

HUBBARD STREET DANCE CHICAGO
The Chicago-based contemporary-dance ensemble returns to the Joyce. Two new pieces by in-house choreographers deal with architecture, either as an explicit subject ("Palladio") or as part of the stage design ("Extremely Close"). In the latter, by the Madrid-born Alejandro Cerrudo, a series of moody interactions take place among elegant white panels that conceal, reveal, and enclose space and movement; the work is set to piano pieces by Philip Glass and Dustin O'Halloran. Cerrudo's "Lickety-

Split" (2006) is included on the second program, along with a dance by his more famous countryman Nacho Duato—the sensual, North African-inflected "Gnawa"—and Doug Varone's "The Constant Shift of Pulse," from 2006. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Aug. 4-5 at 7:30. Through Aug. 16.)

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW
July 30-Aug. 3: The immensely charming Brazilian social-dance troupe Mimulus returns. At the Ted Shawn Theatre, "Dolores" draws inspiration from the films of Pedro Almodóvar, and, in that spirit, the piece is imaginative, absurd, sexy, and disturbing. The tango and salsa duets, sometimes same-sex, are inventive and sensual, but there's also much dragging and spinning of women by their hair and turning them upside down and using them to sweep the floor. The ambiguity is heightened by the multiple zones of action: there's always something else going on. ♦ July 31-Aug. 3: The photographer and filmmaker David Michalek brings "Slow Dancing," his innovative exhibition of video portraits from last year, to the Doris Duke. Using an extreme-slow-motion camera developed by NASA, Michalek recorded dancers performing a five-second phrase, then stretched it to fill five minutes. The quicksilver Shantala Shivalingappa (a master of Kuchipudi, an Indian classical-dance form), Fang-Yi Sheu (a former Martha Graham dancer), and Holley Farmer (a Merce Cunningham veteran) will add a theatrical element, each performing a phrase that was shot by Michalek, followed by the slow-motion video and a discussion. ♦ Aug. 1 at 6:30: On a breathtaking outdoor stage overlooking the lush Berkshire hills, Hawaii's Hālau I Ka Wēkiu, a company that specializes in traditional hula—the authentic, storytelling kind, not the hotel-tourist-show kind—offers a program demonstrating the vitality of this ancient art form. (Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. For a complete schedule, visit www.jacobspillow.org. Through Aug. 24.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

CONCERTS IN TOWN

(LE) POISSON ROUGE
Max Richter is an imaginative young British composer who draws plaintive lines of instrumental lyricism against a background of spoken text and a range of antique electronic sounds—a kind of emo Annie Gosfield. In three concerts this week (presented by the Wordless Music series), he offers selections from his new album, "24 Postcards in Full Colour," among other works. Sharing the program with him are, successively, the downtown music stars Kathleen Supové (on piano) and Jennifer Choi (on violin); the pianist Bruce Brubaker, renowned for his interpretations of the music of John Adams and Philip Glass; and Bing and Ruth. (158 Bleecker St. 800-838-3006. July 29-31 at 8. Doors open one hour before the performances begin.)

MOSTLY MOZART FESTIVAL
Distinguished foreign ensembles dominate the week. July 31 at 7:30: The Freiburg Baroque Orchestra performs an all-Mozart concert that includes such favorites as the Symphony No. 36 ("Linz"), the Piano Concerto No. 20 in D Minor (with the exuberant fortepianist Kristian Bezuidenhout), and a selection of arias from "Così Fan Tutte" and "Le Nozze di Figaro" (with the astute young baritone Christian Gerhaher). (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St.) ♦ Aug. 1-2 at 8: After opening the festival with a healthy dose of Mahler, Louis Langrée and his Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra return to offer a (mostly) Mozart program (the "Prague" Symphony, the Adagio and Fugue, the Masonic Funeral Music, and two arias), with just a dash of Webern (the limpid, and rarely performed, "Five Canons After Latin Texts" and "Five Religious Songs"); the young German soprano Christiane Oelze ties it all together. (Avery Fisher Hall.) ♦ Aug. 3 at 5: London's Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment comes to New York to concentrate exclusively on Mozart—a concert performance of **"La Clemenza di Tito,"** featuring such singers as the tenor Toby Spence and the mezzo-soprano Alice Coote; Edward Gardner conducts. (Rose Theatre.) ♦ Aug. 4-5 at 7:30: Rinaldo Alessandrini conducts his acclaimed ensemble Concerto Italiano (in its festival début) in two evenings at the Rose Theatre. The first features sacred vocal works by Melani, Scarlatti, and Pergolesi; the second offers a clutch of Vivaldi concertos. (212-721-6500.)

CARL DAVIS AND THE KNIGHTS: "THE CHARLIE CHAPLIN MUTUALS"
As part of the Celebrate Brooklyn! series, Great Britain's most prestigious film composer teams up with the dashing young Brooklyn chamber orchestra to offer his new scores for three classic Chaplin shorts—"The Rink," "The Immigrant," and "The Adventurer"—synchronized with showings of the films. (Prospect Park Band Shell, Prospect Park W. at 9th St. Aug. 1 at 7:30. No tickets required.)

SUMMERGARDEN
The Museum of Modern Art's plein-air festival, held in the Sculpture Garden since 1971 and dedicated to new music, continues with a concert by the excellent New Juilliard Ensemble that features world and New York premières of works by an international roster of composers that includes Judith Shatin, Ricardo Romaneiro ("Storm King"), and Andrew Ford. (11 W. 53rd St. Aug. 3 at 8. Free tickets, which are required, are available at the box office one hour before the performance.)

RIVER TO RIVER FESTIVAL: WU MAN
The dazzling virtuoso of the *pipa* (the Chinese lute) offers a selection of traditional music as well as two of her own compositions ("Collage" and "Night Thoughts"). (Michael Schimmel Center for the Arts, Pace University. Aug. 4 at 7:30. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-346-1715.)

OUT OF TOWN

TANGLEWOOD FESTIVAL
July 30 at 7: The Freiburg Baroque Orchestra offers a preview of their Mostly Mozart program, with the Clarinet Concerto (featuring Lorenzo Coppola) replacing the Piano Concerto No. 20. (See Concerts in Town.) ♦ July 31 at 8: In an extraordinary collaboration with the Shanghai String Quartet, the magnificent male chorus Chanticleer offers Chen Yi's new work "From the Path of Beauty" as part of a concert that also includes vocal pieces by Ligeti and Steven Stucky and a selection of folk and gospel songs. ♦ Aug. 1 at 8:30: Joshua Bell, an elegant custodian of the standard violin repertory, performs Chausson's "Poème" and Saint-Saëns's "Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso" with the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the conductor Peter Oundjian; works by Ravel and Mussorgsky ("Pictures at an Exhibition") bookend the program. ♦ Aug. 2 at 8:30: In one of the highlights of the season, a first-rate Metropolitan Opera cast—Renée Fleming, Ramón Vargas, Peter Mattei, and Vitalij Kowaljow—takes the leading roles in a concert performance (with English supertitles) of Tchaikovsky's **"Eugene Onegin"**; Andrew Davis conducts. ♦ Aug. 3 at 2:30: The annual Serge and Olga Koussevitsky concert was a favorite slot of Leonard Bernstein; this year, Carlos Miguel Prieto takes up the baton to lead performances of works by Albéniz (the "Iberia" Suite), Lalo (the gracious Cello Concerto, with Yo-Yo Ma), and Rachmaninoff (the Symphonic Dances). (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200.)

BARD SUMMERSCAPE: "KING ROGER"
This 1926 opera, at once sonically and intellectually sumptuous, by Karol Szymanowski—Poland's most important composer between Chopin and Lutoslawski—has long lingered on the edge of the repertory. Leon Botstein, conducting the American Symphony Orchestra, has commissioned a Polish

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production, directed by Lech Majewski and choreographed by Noémie Lafrance; the same team will also offer, as a prelude to the short three-act opera, Szymanowski's "Harnasie," a folk-inspired cross between oratorio and ballet. (Fisher Center, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900. July 31 and Aug. 2 at 8 and Aug. 3 at 3.)

"NEW ALBION AT SUMMERSCAPE"
The lulling rhythms and soothing colors of West Coast music will come to the Hudson Valley when a mini-festival devoted to the composers and artists of California's beloved New Albion record label opens at the Spiegeltent. The first concert offers works by Lou Harrison, Daniel Lentz, and a rara avis of the New York scene, Morton Feldman; other programs feature works by Rzewski, Adams, Dresher, and Cage. (Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900. Aug. 1 at 8:30. Through Aug. 10. For full schedule, see www.fishercenter.bard.edu.)

GLIMMERGLASS OPERA
Shakespeare is all the rage at Glimmerglass this summer. July 31 at 8, Aug. 2 at 1:30, and Aug. 4 at 2: The director Diane Paulus takes **"Kiss Me, Kate"**—Cole Porter's charmingly Runyonesque treatment of "The Taming of the Shrew"—for a spin. Lisa Vroman and Brad Little and Courtney Romano and David Larsen are the musical's two contentious couples; David Charles Abell conducts. ♦ Aug. 1 at 8 and Aug. 5 at 2: David Stern conducts a production of Handel's **"Giulio Cesare"** that features Laura Vlasak Nolen singing the "pants role" of the title, with Lyubov Petrova, another singer from the roster of the Metropolitan Opera, as Cleopatra. ♦ Aug. 2 at 8: Glimmerglass makes history by offering the first fully staged American performances of the young Richard Wagner's second opera, **"Das Liebesverbot"** ("The Ban on Love"), a bel-canto style comic work based on "Measure for Measure." Nicholas Muni's production sets the work in nineteen-fifties Italy; Corrado Rovaris conducts a cast that features Mark Schnaible, Claudia Waite, Richard Cox, and Holli Harrison. ♦ Aug. 3 at 3: The festival introduces the last entry in its summer repertory, Anne Bogart's production of Bellini's **"I Capuleti e i Montecchi,"** a melodious adaptation of the story that inspired Shakespeare to write "Romeo and Juliet." Sarah Coburn and Sandra Piques Eddy (*en travesti*) take the leading roles; David Angus conducts. (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255.)

CARAMOOR FESTIVAL
Aug. 1 at 8: Jazz dominates the final week at Caramoor, at a level becoming this most elegant of summer festivals. It begins in the intimate Spanish Courtyard, with a set by the Ahmad Jamal Trio. ♦ Aug. 2 at 3: Things heat up at the larger Venetian Theatre, with a six-hour marathon concert (with dinner break) that starts off with a "Cuban Piano Summit," featuring Elio Villafranca and Chuchito Valdes, and concludes with a set performed by Wynton Marsalis and his ensemble. ♦ Aug. 3 at 3: The final day of performances begins with the pianists Aaron Diehl and Adam Birnbaum, continues with the Jimmy Heath Big Band, and winds up with the Michel Camilo Trio (featuring Charles Flores and Dafnis Prieto). (Katonah, N.Y. 914-232-1252.)

MARLBORO FESTIVAL
The festival and school founded by Rudolf Serkin remains a bastion of chamber music at its best, with some of the world's leading musicians (including the pianist Richard Goode and the composer Tigran Mansurian) and their remarkably talented protégés. Concert programs, dominated by the Viennese classics, are listed a week in advance on the festival's Web site, www.marlboromusic.org. (Marlboro, Vt. 802-254-2394. Aug. 1-2 at 8:30 and Aug. 3 at 2:30.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN
Two superb ensembles are in residence at northern Connecticut's string-quartet shrine. Aug. 2 at 6:30: The engaging and expert young Daedalus String Quartet performs works by Haydn, Shostakovich (the Quartet No. 3 in F Major, one of his greatest), and Brahms (the Clarinet Quintet, with David Shifrin). ♦ Aug. 3 at 3: Russia's richly experienced St. Petersburg Quartet joins the bass-baritone Jan Opalach and the pianist Ted Taylor for an all-Schubert concert that includes not only the String Quartets in A Minor and D Minor ("Death and the Maiden") but a selection of important songs (such as "Gretchen am Spinnrade" and "Der Tod und das Mädchen"). (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS
Trio Solisti, a piano trio renowned for its brilliant style and high energy, headlines the weekend at the Hudson Valley's woodland music chapel, moving from the tranquillity of Schubert (the Notturno in E-Flat Major) to the elegance of Ravel and the might of Mussorgsky ("Pictures at an Exhibition," arranged by the trio). (Woodstock, N.Y. Aug. 3 at 4. For more information, call 845-679-8217.)

Vetiver, from San Francisco, plays a pair of shows this week.

DANIELLE SIEGELBAUM

MOVIES OPENING

AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL
A documentary, directed by Darryl Roberts, about the national obsession with plastic surgery. Opening Aug. 1. (Cinema Village.)

FROZEN RIVER
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Aug. 1. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

IN SEARCH OF A MIDNIGHT KISS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Aug. 1. (IFC Center.)

THE MIDNIGHT MEAT TRAIN
A horror film, based on a short story by Clive Barker, about a photographer who takes pictures of a serial killer. Starring Bradley Cooper and Brooke Shields; directed by Ryuhei Kitamura. Opening Aug. 1. (In wide release.)

THE MUMMY: TOMB OF THE DRAGON EMPEROR
Rob Cohen directed this action film, starring Brendan Fraser, Jet Li, and Michelle Yeoh, about an explorer who must combat a reincarnated monarch. Opening Aug. 1. (In wide release.)

SIXTY SIX
An autobiographical coming-of-age drama, directed by Paul Weiland, about a twelve-year-old boy who prepares for his bar mitzvah while England prepares to play in the World Cup finals. Opening Aug. 1. (Village East Cinemas and 64th and 2nd.)

STEALING AMERICA: VOTE BY VOTE
A documentary, directed by Dorothy Fadiman, about patterns of irregularities in American election results in the past decade. Opening Aug. 1. (Quad Cinema.)

SWING VOTE
A comedy, directed by Joshua Michael Stern, about an aging slacker whose vote will decide the Presidential election. Starring Kevin Costner, Dennis Hopper, Kelsey Grammer, Stanley Tucci, and Nathan Lane. Opening Aug. 1. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

BAGHEAD
This resolutely scruffy horror-romance by Jay and Mark Duplass—the first genre film by members of the so-called "mumblecore" band of independent filmmakers—is short on dramatic values but long on conceptual smarts. The story concerns four struggling young actors in Los Angeles, two men and two women, who hole up in a rural cabin to write a film. Though planning to make a love story based on their own romantic tribulations, they switch to a horror movie after one of the women recounts a nightmare she had—and, suddenly, real-life horrors begin to impinge on their idyll. Much of the dialogue is improvised and the action unfolds loosely, but the Duplass brothers, who do the camera and sound work themselves, are canny about the personal significance of their casual means of production: the film's outsider artists are modelled on themselves and their friends, and their methods are one with their milieu. The shaky camera wearies the eye but beguiles the mind, as if the filmmakers, aping the style of home movies, are also borrowing their function and fabricating sweet memories before our eyes, indulging in nostalgia for the present. The plot-driven horror-movie framework sometimes stifles the freewheeling quartet of actors (the hyperarticulate Greta Gerwig seems particularly muted), but they nonetheless conjure a low-key intimacy to balance the project's whiz-bang ingenuity.—*Richard Brody* (Empire 25 and Sunshine Cinema.)

BRIDESHEAD REVISITED
This episodic period drama, based on the 1945 novel by Evelyn Waugh, follows Charles Ryder (Matthew Goode), a soldier in the Second World War, as he looks back on his life. The story starts with him as a young artist at Oxford in the nineteen-twenties; there, he falls in love with the flamboyantly profligate life style of a pair of siblings, the aristocratic Sebastian (Ben Whishaw) and his beautiful sister, Julia (Hayley Atwell). Charles spends some time at Brideshead, their spectacular estate, where their staunchly Catholic mother (Emma Thompson) marches around in dour frocks ordering everyone to chapel, and attempts to dissuade her beloved Sebastian from following his homosexual tendencies. The screenwriters, Andrew Davies and Jeremy Brock, took many liberties with the book, altering not only plot points but also the main thrust of Charles's spiritual journey: instead of turning from an agnostic into a Catholic, he starts out an atheist and, seemingly, remains one. This change lends nothing to the film, a torpid version of a classic which is ultimately and unjustly devoid of passion. Directed by Julian Jarrold.—*Shauna Lyon* (In wide release.)

THE DARK KNIGHT
The last Batman movie was grim and methodical; this one, also directed by Christopher Nolan, is grim and incoherent, with a thudding soundtrack, fights shot from too close a distance to see anything, multiple events clanging together like discordant bells, and freaky sadism and menace. Christian Bale is the placid Bruce Wayne, a swank gent in Armani suits. As Batman, he has greater urgency, but he delivers his lines

in a hoarse voice with an unvarying inflection. He's no match for the great Heath Ledger as his nemesis, the Joker. Ledger, in a fright wig and gobs of white makeup, shambles and slides into a room, bending his knees and twisting his neck and suddenly surging right into someone's face like a deep-sea creature coming up for air. He's thoroughly terrifying (do not, despite the PG-13 rating, bring little children), and, as you're watching him, you can't help wondering how badly he messed himself up in order to play the role this way. "The Dark Knight" has been made in a time of terror, but it's not fighting terror; it's embracing and unleashing it—while making sure, with proper calculation, to set up the next installment of the corporate franchise. With Gary Oldman, Aaron Eckhart, and Maggie Gyllenhaal.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 7/21/08.) (In wide release.)

FROZEN RIVER

The chill air of December in northern New York State, at the Canadian border, blows through the hardscrabble lives on view in Courtney Hunt's first feature film, a prize-winner at the Sundance festival. Ray Eddy (Melissa Leo), a mother of two boys, has just been abandoned by her husband, a recovering drug addict and a compulsive gambler, who's run off with the bankroll that was earmarked for a new, warm double-wide trailer. Searching for him at the nearby Mohawk reservation, she meets Lila Littlewolf (Misty Upham), who lures her into smuggling a pair of Chinese immigrants into the United States. The cash that goes with it suggests to Ray a way out of her plight. Hunt's film, made quickly and on a low budget, is full of traditional virtues—sympathetic and complex characters, plausible situations, evocative locations, committed acting, painful moral dilemmas—everything but a touch of mad beauty and a raison d'être. Hunt, who also wrote the script, directs a story of misery and transcendence with the kind of diligent efficiency to be expected from an experienced studio toiler. What hath Sundance wrought?—*R.B.* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

HANCOCK

Will Smith's lonely, alcoholic superhero—a nihilist slob who can't fly anywhere in Los Angeles without making a mess—is hated by everybody. The public curses him, and even the Dickensian TV lawyer Nancy Grace—of the curling lip and ferocious eye—gets on his case. A good-hearted P.R. man, Ray Embrey (Jason Bateman), tries to do something for Hancock's image. But then Ray introduces Hancock to his wife, Mary (Charlize Theron), and this inventive summer spectacle adds sexual tension and emotional power to its visual gags. For the first time in his life, Will Smith doesn't smile and tease and drawl; he stays in character as a self-hating lonely guy, and Theron, no longer covering her beauty, looks at him with an uncanny mixture of attraction and alarm. The movie takes surprising turns and is unexpectedly affecting. Written by Vy Vincent Ngo and Vince Gilligan and directed by Peter Berg.—*D.D.* (7/7 & 14/08) (In wide release.)

HELLBOY II: THE GOLDEN ARMY

The fabulist director Guillermo del Toro gets a hefty budget to continue his comic-book franchise with this action-packed fantasy about a heroic demon (Ron Perlman) and his fellow-beasties (Selma Blair and Doug Jones). This time, his team is joined by an ectoplasmic force (voiced by Seth MacFarlane, with a Colonel Klink-like accent) that can animate inanimate objects. It's that kind of movie. The plot is thin, involving some hooey about the denizens of a hidden underground world who are out to destroy humanity. And, while Hellboy and his friends set out to save the day, intriguing story lines are brought up and then dropped. (In all likelihood they will be picked up in a third installment.) This film is happy to coast on its good humor and brilliant action pieces. Fair enough, since del Toro has taken the poetry of some of his best work and butched it up, creating some of the most amazing-looking creatures and battles of his career. It's eye candy for the "Creature Features" set.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

IKIRU

Akira Kurosawa has too long been pegged as an artist of action and a maker of epics. This 1952 masterwork proves that he was not merely a movie master but also a virtuoso humanist. Here, he uses multiple film and narrative techniques to dramatize, without tears, the plight of a dying city-government bureaucrat who looks for shreds of meaning in his family and in his profession. Kurosawa achieves the piercing emotion and poetry of the Italian neorealists, but by opposite means: he doesn't make the camera disappear; instead, from the first view of the hero's X-rays, he deploys his camera so sharply and unerringly that it seems to take X-rays of the spirit. In Takashi Shimura, Kurosawa found an actor who could stand up to this kind of scrutiny. The crowning image, of Shimura on a swing in a city park, crooning a song about life's brevity as the snow falls, comes as close as any big-screen moment to Joycean epiphany. In Japanese.—*Michael Sragow* (Walter Reade; Aug. 2.)

JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH

The work of Jules Verne continues to offer fertile ground for filmmakers. This latest adaptation of the 1864 novel is less fruitful than the 1959 attempt, in which the softly decisive voice of James Mason acted as a special effect in itself. Still, the new film, directed by Eric Brevig, at least has the courage of its own silliness; dispensing almost instantly with logic, it plunges its professor hero (Brendan Fraser) and his reluctant nephew (Josh Hutcherson) with Vernian briskness into their subterranean exploits, during which they encounter a lonely Icelandic maiden, a thundering dinosaur, and other fantastical creatures. Some theatres will be screening the movie in 3-D: worth catching, if you want the full, headlong nonsense to loom out and smack you in the face.—*Anthony Lane* (7/28/08) (In wide release.)

THE LAST MISTRESS

With the director Catherine Breillat, you know you'll get sex and pain; this period adaptation of an 1851 novel by Barbey d'Aurevilly delivers them with such style and conviction that her familiar themes become new again. A young Parisian nobleman, Ryno de Marigny (Fu'ad Aït Aattou), is about to marry the virginal Hermangarde de Polastron (Roxane Mesquida) despite his notorious ten-year affair with a cigar-smoking Spanish spitfire, Vellini (Asia Argento), a drawing-room Carmen who pursues her prey with ruthless audacity. In the kind of performance that is routinely called daring, Argento lets loose earsplitting screams and throws her naked body around with abandon, but she does the substantive work quietly, with smoldering stares and chilling whispers of mad intent. Breillat gives the entire cast of characters delicately declamatory manners that fit the refined depravity of their milieu, and she frames them in subtly sculptural images to match. From knife blade to broken glass, from bullet to gynecological ordeal, bloodshed saturates the taut dramatic fabric and suggests the destructive power of an obsession that owes little to pleasure. With Michael Lonsdale and Yolande Moreau as a chorus of elders who get caught up in the tumult. In French.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

LITTLE CAESAR

Edward G. Robinson's performance in this 1931 crime drama, as Caesar Enrico Bandello, a small-time hood who dreams of the big time and crashes the Chicago rackets, set the tone for the vulgar preening and sneering pugnacity of the tough-talking Hollywood mobster, and Mervyn LeRoy's cold, efficient direction—less a result of his own artistry than of the constraints of the first years of sound recording—imposes a static rigor on the action and the diction which rises to the grandeur of a sculptural, granitic force. The terse, epigrammatic narrative offers every hardboiled cliché in its naïve, original form, from the gangster who falls in love (Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.) and wants to go straight and the Mob boss (Stanley Fields) who goes soft ("Sam, you can dish it out, but you're gettin' so you can't take it no more!") to the laconically sarcastic Irish police officer (Thomas Jackson), the prodigal gangland banquet, and the operatic death throes. The psychosexual subtexts of later gangster movies are there too, as when Little Caesar draws his slight, furtive cohort Otero (George E. Stone) onto his bed for a meaningful tête-à-tête. Based on the novel by W. R. Burnett.—*R.B.* (MOMA; Aug. 4.)

MAMMA MIA!

If viewed on a Saturday night with seven or eight friends, all drunk, this might seem a compelling dose of musical entertainment. Under any other conditions, it barely approaches the tolerable. Meryl Streep, having clearly given much thought to the art of letting one's hair down, plays Donna, who runs a hotel

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TABLES FOR TWO
EIGHTY ONE

HONORÉ BROWN

45 W. 81st St. (212-873-8181)—At this new American eatery, just across from the Museum of Natural History, surprises abound. One evening, a hostess led a party past the main room and down a narrow hallway, which opened into the kitchen: a gantlet of sorts, lined with staff, all of whom rushed to wish the guests good evening. One didn't quite know where to look, or how to respond. Then onward, to what looked like the library of a very tasteful gentleman—soft jazz, art tomes, dark wood. It felt advisable to keep one's voice down, and perfectly fitting that Tom Wolfe, that chronicler of decadence, also dined at the restaurant that evening. ("I told him we were bringing back the necktie," a similarly beknotted host said, as the impeccably elegant author passed through the entry.)

Even if, more commonly, one is seated in the main dining room—bordello-ish, with red plush banquettes and red drapery, but with an Arctic chill to the air—the element of subversion remains. Knives stand on edge; the plates veer slightly off center. And the chef, Ed Brown, seems to delight in preparing dishes in which appearance diverges from taste. An entrée of salmon, looking like a petal-pink-and-pale-green Lilly Pulitzer print, seemed utterly old-fashioned. There was the dill, the firm peas, the whole pearl onions; but the flavors of sea and land were remarkably precise. What looked incongruously like guacamole, accompanying the superb veal (along with veal cheek, pure delicious fat that melted on the tongue), turned out to be an asparagus purée; codfish, heaped with crispy shallots, tasted like French onion soup.

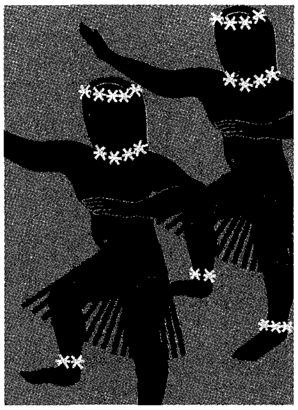
Brown does the straightforward, too—a nicely cooked steak, scallops adrift in foam—and he's particularly adept at drawing forth the seasonal. A chilled soup of fava beans and peas tasted like distilled spring, while a green-bean salad, pertly dressed with a cucumber vinaigrette, was almost too abundant for the plate. Thick spears of asparagus and fennel were draped with thinly sliced ham. "What's not to like about a bacon salad?" a diner asked. An apricot-and-Bing-cherry crumble achieved a golden ratio of sweet topping to tart filling, handily trumping peanut-butter fritters and a geometric chocolate-and-hazelnut mille-feuille. Tricks are nice, but the fruits of the season win out. (Open daily for dinner. Entrées $27-$39.)

—*Andrea Thompson*

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
LOVELY HULA HANDS

In New York, we get to see a lot of traditional dance (formerly called folk dance), but one form that visits us rarely is hula, from our own country. Like many other traditional dance forms, hula was heavily discouraged by missionaries and other representatives of Euro-America in the nineteenth century. It seemed to them immoral, and also a waste of time. But it survived in the countryside, and, as in the usual colonial/post-colonial stories, there was eventually a vigorous revival, headed by cultural loyalists. When I was at Girl Scout camp, we were taught a species of hula, floral and sinuous, to "Lovely Hula Hands," as played by our counsellor on the ukulele. Most Hawaiian versions are different. The dancers often do wear grass skirts and leis, but their movements are gutty, pelvic, rhythmic. The women tend to be heavy; the men thick-thighed. Some of the routines began as war dances. Hālau I Ka Wēkiu, a troupe from Oahu, is travelling the Eastern Seaboard this month. They will perform at Jacob's Pillow on Aug. 1 and at Symphony Space on Aug. 8.

—*Joan Acocella*



on a Greek island and pretends to forget her heady, promiscuous past; needless to say, it surfaces again when her daughter, Sophie (Amanda Seyfried), a bride-to-be, invites the three men who could conceivably be her father (Pierce Brosnan, Colin Firth, and Stellan Skarsgård) to attend the festivities. All of this is an excuse for the stars to perform, with varying degrees of skill, the greatest hits of Abba, some of which, regrettably, do not survive the disfigurement. Brosnan appears to be laboring under particular distress, and his expression, as he listens to Streep chanting her woes, is indistinguishable from that of James Bond being ranted at by a deluded villain. The script is by Catherine Johnson, who wrote the original stage play; the play's director, Phyllida Lloyd, is also along for the ride, and she seems so thrilled to have a camera at her command that she forces many of her actors to yelp and croon in closeup—never a good idea. The lighting would disgrace the interior of a bathroom. With Christine Baranski, who really can sing and dance, and Julie Walters, who can't.—*A.L.* (7/28/08) (In wide release.)

MAN ON WIRE

In 1974, Philippe Petit, the poet of the high wire, sneaked his merry men into one of the towers of the World Trade Center, strung a cable across to its sister building, and performed an above-the-clouds ballet that has never been equalled. This documentary, written and directed by James Marsh, takes the archival footage of the event and, using new interviews with the participants as well as staged reconstructions, weaves an exciting tale that plays like a heist film. The story of how and why Petit accomplished this astonishing feat is thrilling, and the charismatic Frenchman was made for the camera. He's graceful, articulate, and endearing, much like the film itself.—*B.D.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

TELL NO ONE

The young director and actor Guillaume Canet, working with the screenwriter Philippe Lefebvre, has taken Harlan Coben's American mystery novel from 2001 and set it in the realistic social and working world of Paris and its environs, where good-looking, intelligent, and articulate people find one another interesting. François Cluzet dominates the movie, as a pediatrician whose wife was murdered eight years previously. When messages show up on his computer suggesting that she may still be alive, he's amazed, and tries to reach her, only to run into the police and half the criminal underworld of Paris. Bounced back and forth among murderers and psychopaths, he has some remarkable adventures and learns about the past in tiny increments. We're meant to be a little lost, too—tantalized by hints and echoes. Underneath all the mysteries, however, there are some powerful forces at work, including the love of parents for children (one of whom is played by Canet himself). With Kristin Scott Thomas, André Dussollier, and Jean Rochefort. In French.—*D.D.* (7/7 & 14/08) (In wide release.)

THE WACKNESS

Ben Kingsley strains for his Alan Arkin moment in this pseudo-edgy, Manhattan-centric comic drama in the vein of "Little Miss Sunshine," set in 1994, in the age of Giuliani (whose name crops up repeatedly as a symbol of all the repressed grunginess of yore). The young director Jonathan Levine draws on the romantic frustrations of his own high-school years to tell the sincere and mawkish yet loopy story of Luke Shapiro (Josh Peck), who graduates from a private school on the Upper East Side with low grades and a high-profit job as a marijuana dealer, peddling his wares from a pushcart labelled "Ices." When Luke is down in the dumps, he sees a psychiatrist, Dr. Jeffrey Squires (Kingsley), whom he pays in dime or quarter bags—and who is the stepfather of Stephanie (Olivia Thirlby), the object of Luke's affection. The burgeoning romance is sweet and plausible, if utterly conventional, but Kingsley's weird-old-man routine, played out in the shrink's growing bond with the smart yet naïve young slacker, is fake and vain, a shameless play for an Oscar nod. With Famke Janssen, Method Man, and, for no reason at all, Mary-Kate Olsen.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

WALL-E

It has the waggish adorableness and the tripping-and-falling roughhouse of other animated films, but it's also a work of tragic nostalgia. In the first half, WALL-E, a robotic trash collector and compactor, continues to go about his duties after the human presence has been blown away from Earth by billowing waves of noxious dust. He trolls among the detritus of the vanished culture, fetishizing such junk items as plastic forks, hubcaps, and a tape of the lumbering musical "Hello, Dolly!," which provides him with models of human connection and such oddities as singing and dancing. A robot named EVE—she looks like a hovering white plastic egg designed by Steve Jobs's gang in Cupertino—lands on Earth; he woos her, and then accompanies her to a space station called the Axiom, where, it turns out, the remaining humans have been living for seven hundred years in a totalitarian pleasure garden run by a giant big-box-store company. "WALL-E" blends two kinds of science fiction—the postapocalyptic disaster movie and the dystopian fantasy derived from Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World," in which people are controlled not by coercion but by pleasure. It's also a satire on the engulfing tendencies of consumer capitalism. From the Pixar division of Disney. Directed by Andrew Stanton.—*D.D.* (7/21/08) (In wide release.)

WANTED

After "Night Watch" and "Day Watch," two of the most successful—and certainly the loudest—Russian films ever made, the director Timur Bekmambetov has turned his hungry eyes on the United States. The result is this furious and fantastical piece of junk, which, though nominally set in some town called "Chicago," could take place almost anywhere with roads. The plot entails yet another revenge of the nerd: an accountant (James McAvoy) who follows in the footsteps of his father and becomes a dexterous assassin. He is trained in this delicate art by Sloan (Morgan Freeman), Fox (Angelina Jolie), and a bunch of other killers who have the best interests of the world at heart and, one hopes, their tongues firmly stapled to their cheeks. The outcome should be playful and zippy, and some of the chase sequences, to be fair, are enjoyably shameless in their rush to excess; but the film as a whole feels much nastier than it needs to be, abounding in details of damaged flesh, and it leaves a sour taste.—*A.L.* (6/30/08) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

AMERICAN TEEN: In limited release. **BOY A:** Film Forum. **STEP BROTHERS:** In wide release. **THE X-FILES: I WANT TO BELIEVE:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—Special screenings. July 30-31 at 6:45: "I, Pierre Rivière, Having Slaughtered My Mother, My Sister, and My Brother . . ." (1976, René Allio; in French). ♦ July 30-31 at 9:15: "Back to Normandy" (2007, Nicolas Philibert; in French). ♦ Aug. 1 and Aug. 4-7 at 7 and 9 and Aug. 2-3 at 5, 7, and 9: "Profit Motive and the Whispering Wind" (2007, John Gianvito) and "New Left Note" (1968-82, Saul Levine; silent). ♦ "Classics from Kino International." July 31-Aug. 1 at 7:30 and 9:30: "Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors" (1964, Sergei Paradjanov; in Ukrainian). ♦ Aug. 2 at 4: "Andrei Rublev" (1969, Andrei Tarkovsky; in Russian). ♦ Aug. 2 at 8: "The Mirror" (Tarkovsky; in Russian). ♦ Aug. 3 at 6: "City Lights" (1931, Charlie Chaplin; silent). ♦ Aug. 3 at 8: "The Great Dictator" (1940, Chaplin).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Four from Robert Hamer." July 30 at 6:50 and 9:30: "Father Brown" (1954). ♦ July 31 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "It Always Rains on Sunday" (1947). ♦ The films of Elliott Gould. Aug. 1-3 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15 and Aug. 4-5 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "M*A*S*H" (1970, Robert Altman).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through Aug. 7: "The Human Condition"

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(1959-61, Masaki Kobayashi; in Japanese), in three parts. July 30 at 2 and 7:30 and Aug. 3 at noon: Part 1, "No Greater Love." ♦ July 31 and Aug. 4-6 at 2 and 7:30, Aug. 2 at noon, 4, and 8:10, and Aug. 3 at 7:40: Part 3, "A Soldier's Prayer." ♦ Aug. 1 at 1, 4:40, and 8:20 and Aug. 3 at 4: Part 2, "Road to Eternity."

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. Aug. 1-3 at 11 A.M.: "Secrets of Women" (1952, Ingmar Bergman). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Aug. 1-2: "Riot on Sunset Strip" (1967, Arthur Dreifuss).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving." July 30-Aug. 1 at 1:30: "Kitty Foyle" (1940, Sam Wood). ♦ "Salvador Dalí and Three American Surrealists." July 30 at 6: "A Day at the Races" (1937, Wood). ♦ July 31 at 6: "The Sign of the Cross" (1933, Cecil B. De Mille). ♦ "Jazz Score." Aug. 1 at 6 and Aug. 3 at 2:30: "Repulsion" (1965, Roman Polanski) and "On Fighting Witches" (1965, Robert Shaye). ♦ Aug. 1 at 8:30 and Aug. 3 at 5:30: "Jack Johnson" (1970, William Clayton) and "On Animal Locomotion" (1994, Johann van der Keuken). ♦ "Collaborations in the Collection." Aug. 2 at 3: "Blood Simple" (1984, Joel Coen). ♦ Aug. 2 at 5: "Raising Arizona" (1987, Coen). ♦ Aug. 2 at 7: "Miller's Crossing" (1990, Coen). ♦ "Salvador Dalí: Consumer/Consumed." Aug. 4 at 6: "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" (1920, Robert Wiene; silent) and "L'Hippocampe" (1934, Jean Painlevé; in French). ♦ Aug. 4 at 8: "Little Caesar" (†).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000, ext. 344)—"Cabaret Cinema." Aug. 1 at 9:30: "Stroszek" (1976, Werner Herzog; in English and German), introduced by the author Annette Insdorf.

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"Japanese Screen Classics: In Honor of Madame Kawakita." All films are in Japanese. July 30 at 5 and Aug. 1 at 7:15: "Rashomon" (1950, Akira Kurosawa). ♦ July 30 at 7 and Aug. 4 at 5: "Her Brother" (1960, Kon Ichikawa). ♦ July 30 at 9 and Aug. 1 at 5: "A Last Note" (1995, Kaneto Shindo). ♦ July 31 at 6:15 and Aug. 2 at 2: "Tora-san's Sunrise and Sunset" (1976, Yoji Yamada). ♦ July 31 at 8:30 and Aug. 3 at 4:30: "Violence at Noon" (1966, Nagisa Oshima). ♦ Aug. 1 at 9:10: "The Yellow Handkerchief" (1977, Yamada). ♦ Aug. 2 at 4:15: "Akiko: Portrait of a Dancer" (1985, Sumiko Haneda). ♦ Aug. 2 at 6:30: "Ikiru" (†). ♦ Aug. 2 at 9:15: "Branded to Kill" (1967, Seijun Suzuki). ♦ Aug. 3 at 1: "Ode to Mt. Hayachine" (1982, Haneda). ♦ Aug. 3 at 6:30 and Aug. 4 at 9:10: "Vengeance Is Mine" (1979, Shohei Imamura). ♦ Aug. 3 at 9:15: "Stray Dog" (1949, Kurosawa). ♦ Aug. 4 at 7: "Boy" (1969, Oshima).

READINGS AND TALKS

"WORD FOR WORD"

Bryant Park's reading series continues on July 30 at 12:30 with the journalist Jonathan Miles, who will read selections from his début novel, "Dear American Airlines." (Sixth Ave. at 42nd St. For more information, call 212-768-4242.)

"MAD. SQ. READS"

The National Book Awards presents a tribute to the late *New Yorker* fiction editor William Maxwell, with Benjamin Cheever, Edward Hirsch, Daniel Menaker, Stewart O'Nan, and Christopher Carduff. (Madison Square Park, Fifth Ave. at 24th St. For more information, call 212-538-6667. July 31 at 6:30.)

BARNES & NOBLE

Luke Dempsey reads from his account of his adventures in birding, "A Supremely Bad Idea: Three Mad Birders and Their Quest to See It All." (97 Warren St. No tickets necessary. Aug. 1 at 7.)

MCNALLY ROBINSON BOOKSELLERS

A discussion about the state of contemporary nuptials, with the *New Yorker* writer Rebecca Mead, the author of "One Perfect Day: The Selling of the American Wedding," and Kamy Wicoff, the author of "I Do but I Don't: Why the Way We Marry Matters." (52 Prince St. No tickets necessary. Aug. 4 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"WALKING WITH DINOSAURS"

It's been a while since athletic giants roamed Madison Square Garden, but, this week, real—or, at least, animatronic—giants will take the floor. This travelling multimedia spectacular features a ten-foot Plateosaurus, an eighteen-foot Stegosaurus, a twenty-three-foot Tyrannosaurus rex, a thirty-six-foot Brachiosaurus, and many other formidable creatures. (212-307-4111. July 30-Aug. 3.)

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"La Passion de Simone," at the Mostly Mozart Festival.

DIVYA SRINIVASAN

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
COPS AND ROBBERS

Aug. 8-Sept. 11

The theme of crime and punishment has a distinctive flavor in each country, and the French cinema has a special way with the underworld milieu. Film Forum's "French Crime Wave" series features such classics as Jules Dassin's "Rififi," Jean-Pierre Melville's "Bob le Flambeur," and François Truffaut's "Shoot the Piano Player," as well as rarities, including Jacques Becker's "Goupi Mains Rouge." (212-727-8110.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
PASSION PLAY

Aug. 13, Aug. 15, and Aug. 17

In "La Passion de Simone," the composer Kaija Saariaho has fashioned a "staged oratorio" out of the life of the French mystic and activist Simone Weil. Peter Sellars will direct it for the Mostly Mozart Festival; the radiant soprano Dawn Upshaw will take the title role. (212-721-6500.)

THE THEATRE
BROTHERLY LOVE

Aug. 22

Playwrights Horizons kicks off its season with the world première of "Three Changes," by Nicky Silver, about an Upper West Side couple who get an unexpected visit from the man's brother, a Hollywood producer. The cast includes Maura Tierney, Dylan McDermott, Scott Cohen, and Aya Cash; Wilson Milam ("The Lieutenant of Inishmore") directs. (212-279-4200.)

NIGHT LIFE
ALL MIXED UP

Aug. 30

Following weeks of regional competitions, the country's finest and most decorated d.j.s descend upon the Knitting Factory for the 2008 DMC USA Finals. The winner goes on to represent America at the DMC World Finals, in London, next month. (www.knittingfactory.com.)

ART
MAO FACTOR

Sept. 5-Jan. 11, 2009

The new exhibit "Art and China's Revolution," opening at the Asia Society, offers a survey of Chinese visual culture in the three decades following the establishment of the People's Republic, in 1949. (212-288-6400.)

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

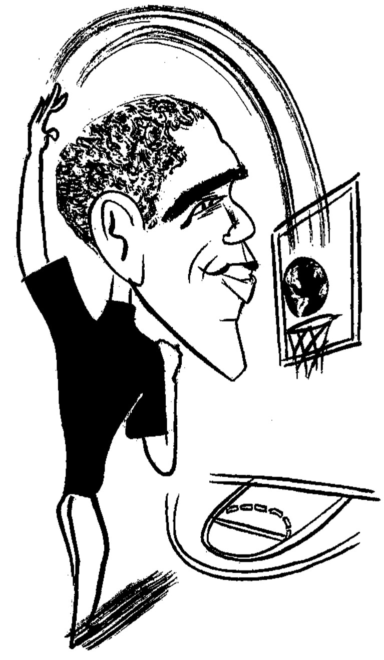
COMMENT
FOREIGNERS

Back in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, candidates for President of the United States didn't have much truck with foreigners. They didn't vote, they lived on the other side of the ocean, and they spoke funny, most of 'em. (If a Frenchman is a man, Jim points out to Huck Finn, "why doan' he *talk* like a man?") Even after America's rise to global power, the only overseas travel seen as obligatory for a Presidential hopeful was to what pols called the Three-I League—Ireland, Italy, and Israel, venues that had more to do with the lingering tribal identities of big-city ethnics than with anything as highfalutin as foreign policy. (Let us note, in the currently fashionable spirit of joke-explaining, that the baseball allusion is to a long-defunct Class B circuit made up of teams from Illinois, Indiana, and Iowa.) Nor did the incumbent get around much during the first fifty-four years of his life. "Bush's foreign travels," the Associated Press reported a few days after the Supreme Court awarded him custody of Air Force One, "have been limited to three visits to Mexico, two trips to Israel, a three-day Thanksgiving visit in Rome with one of his daughters in 1998, and a six-week excursion to China with his parents in 1975." Israel, check. Italy, check. He didn't bother with the third I.

In our post-9/11, post-unipolar, and soon-to-be-post-Bush world, staying home is not an option—especially if you're the "inexperienced" candidate and the opinion polls say that your war-hero opponent is better at foreign policy and national security than you are. Anyway, John McCain had spent months needling Barack Obama for not having lately visited the fourth I. So, last week, off to Iraq he went—and, while he was at it, he doubled and redoubled down, adding Afghanistan, Jordan, Israel, the West Bank, Germany, France, and Britain to his itinerary.

Just before the trip, a leading wire service summarized the prevailing view:

> WASHINGTON (Reuters)—U.S. Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama's overseas trip will be a high-risk debut on the world stage—with the potential pitfalls at least as numerous as the likely rewards.



"On a trip like this, on a stage like this, there is no room for error," Tad Devine, a veteran Democratic operative, told ABC News. "He needs to make sure every word is right, every setting is proper, and that he makes absolutely no mistakes." And *Newsweek's* Richard Wolffe predicted that the trip would be "an extraordinarily public test of a Presidential contender's mastery of world affairs."

Whether or not it was that, it was certainly a test of his mastery of political theatrics, his sure-footedness, and his willingness to take a calculated risk. On the first leg of the trip, Obama found himself in a military gym in Kuwait, a major staging point for Americans going to the war zones. The bleachers were packed with soldiers wearing fatigues. A basketball materialized. "I may not make the first one," he said, no doubt imagining what a metaphor-hungry press would make of a miss or, God forbid, a whole string of misses, "but I'll make one eventually." With a spring of his toes, he put the ball up. When it came down, *swish.*

It was the three-point shot heard round the world, and, for the Obama campaign, things only got better from there. As the candidate whirled through Afghanistan and Iraq—talking with troops, huddling with generals, conferring with presidents and prime ministers—the policy dominoes suddenly began toppling his way, flicked by unexpected fingers. Commanders on the ground in Afghanistan made known their belief that more NATO troops are badly needed there, as Obama has been arguing all along. The Bush Administra-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

tion sent an Under-Secretary of State to a meeting in Geneva with Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, thereby edging toward the kind of direct diplomatic engagement with Tehran that Obama has been urging all along. The White House announced that President Bush and the Iraqi Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, had agreed on the idea of a "time horizon" for withdrawing American troops from Iraq, thus seeming to endorse the general approach that Obama has been advocating (and his opponent just as firmly rejecting) all along. In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, Maliki went stunningly further. Asked to predict when most of the American troops will leave Iraq, he replied:

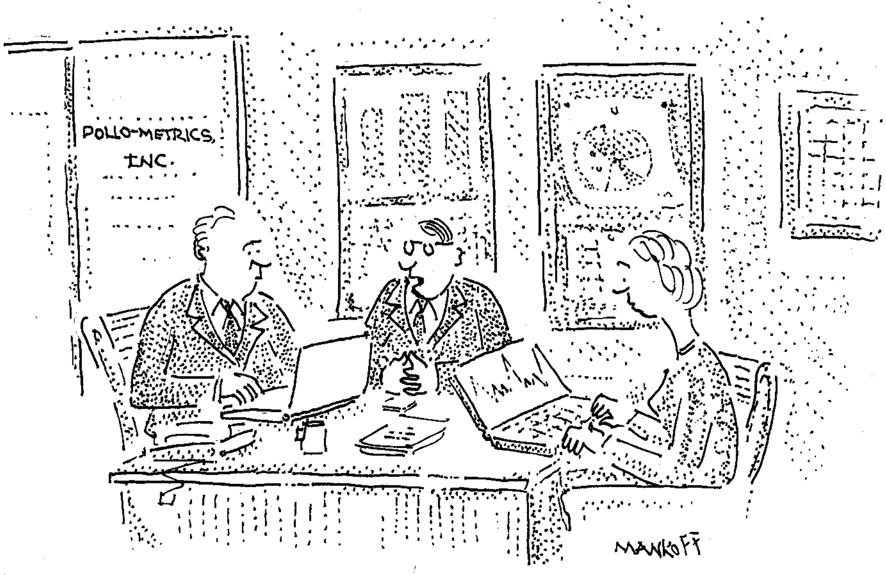
> As soon as possible, as far as we're concerned. U.S. presidential candidate Barack Obama talks about sixteen months. That, we think, would be the right time frame for a withdrawal, with the possibility of slight changes.

After four days of panicky spinning and backtracking from Washington and (at Washington's prodding) Baghdad, an audio recording of the interview—the published text of which, in any case, had been provided to Maliki's office in advance—surfaced, and its accuracy was confirmed. Maliki's spokesman, Ali al-Dabbagh, had the final word: "We cannot give any timetables or dates, but the Iraqi government believes the end of 2010 is the appropriate time for the withdrawal." By the time Obama's plane touched down in Germany, an utterly unanticipated consensus seemed to have emerged: besides having been right about the Iraq war's beginning (i.e., that it should not have had one), he is right, in broad outline, about the path to its ending.

There has been much discussion of whether it will prove politically advantageous for Obama to have addressed a mile-long crowd of two hundred thousand happy Berliners in the golden early-evening sunlight. Berliners are Germans, and Germans are foreigners, and since well before John Kerry was demonized for knowing how to speak French it has been axiomatic that heartland Americans don't like foreigners piping up about our elections, however much brainland Americans may disagree. Obama gained nothing in the polls during his nearly flawless, arguably triumphant grand tour. Still, after seven years during which, even among our closest allies, contempt for Bush bled into resentment of the country that returned him to office, one would have to be an awful grouch not to be gratified by the sight of a sea of delighted Europeans waving American flags instead of burning them and cheering an American politician instead of demonstrating against one.

Back home, one such grouch had ample reason to be grouchy. McCain's luck last week was as bad as Obama's was good. McCain rode in a golf cart with Bush senior; Obama rode in a helicopter with General David Petraeus. Obama was hailed by the German multitudes; McCain, his planned photo op at an offshore rig preëmpted by an oil spill and rained out by Hurricane Dolly, held a press gaggle in front of Schmidt's Fudge Haus, in Columbus, Ohio. Obama got a big kiss ("*Obama? C'est mon copain!*") from the new President of France, a dashing conservative with an exotic background and an unusual name; McCain stood athwart the cheese aisle of a supermarket, complaining. The presumptive Republican nominee had a right to be irritated by what he was complaining about: Obama's reluctance to admit that the surge in Iraq which he opposed has helped make the withdrawal from Iraq which he supports less problematic. But McCain had no right to accuse him, not once but repeatedly last week, of being willing to have his country "lose a war" if it would win him an election. That was shocking; that was unworthy. Obama drained a three-point shot; McCain committed a three-shot foul. The game is getting physical.

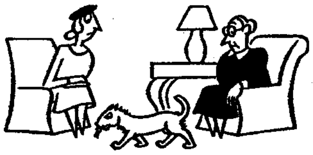
—*Hendrik Hertzberg*



"Look, we've got to improve our voter-tracking algorithms if we want to make more accurate wild-ass guesses."

SIGHTINGS

LOOSE LEMUR



Bill James, the Boston Red Sox senior adviser and resident skeptic, made his name by using statistics to debunk many of baseball's truisms—by showing that much of what we think we see on a ball field turns out to be little more than an illusion when held up to the light of evidence. Then, after the Red Sox won their first World Series in eighty-six years, breaking Babe Ruth's supposed "curse," James published an essay, "Underestimating the Fog," in which he seemed to backpedal on some crucial points. He suggested, for instance, that clutch hitting—long since dismissed by Jamesian rationalists as a myth—might exist after all, and that his colleagues just weren't looking hard enough. Diehards in the statistician community wondered if James hadn't gone soft with age, and begun seeing ghosts.

Several weeks ago, James was walking home from Fenway Park, after a Red Sox victory over the Kansas City Royals, when he came across a strange-looking animal with a speckled gray head. He at first took it to be a cat, but soon noticed a number of peculiar characteristics: the animal had large eyes on the sides of its head, a puglike face, and an extra-long tail ("like a broom handle"), and it moved with "an odd sashaying motion." The moon was full. James was alone on the street. He stared at the animal for, as he later recalled, "a length of time which is probably six or seven times as long as the period that a fly ball is in the air." The animal scurried under a parked car, at one point seeming to lift its hind legs over a stick in the road by using its tail as a kind of lever.

James quickly dispensed with the obvious candidates—dog, squirrel, raccoon, rat, skunk, possum—and began working his way down a checklist of more exotic possibilities: sloth, bear, porcupine, beaver. By the time he reached his house, he had decided that the animal he saw must have been a lemur. Lemurs are primates native to Madagascar, and by all available evidence, he realized, this was unlikely; the odds of stumbling upon a lemur living on the streets of a northeastern metropolis are a little like the odds of a baseball team's going eighty-six years without a championship because of a curse. James says he called the local animal-control center, which informed him that his was the first Boston lemur sighting on record. (The Franklin Park Zoo, in Dorchester, has four ring-tailed lemurs, but all are accounted for.)

One of James's friends discovered a report, on the Web site CryptoZoology.com, of a "strange lemur-like dog" spotted on a farm in Sherborn, Massachusetts, in 2002. ("It reminded me of a small, skinnier version of a Tasmanian wolf," the poster, a filmmaker named Andrew Mudge, wrote.) Sherborn is twenty miles southwest of Boston, and James hypothesized that the lemur could have migrated in the years since and come to be living in the trees of a sanctuary in the area. The city, according to his theory, is an ideal habitat, because there are few natural predators, and the human demographics skew young and indifferent to wildlife. (James, by contrast, lived for most of his life in Kansas, where he saw enough skunks, possums, and raccoons to rule them out immediately.)

James eventually wrote a three-thousand-word account of his sighting and posted it on his Web site, which requires a subscription. "There is a lemur living wild on the streets of Boston, and if I have to be the first person to say so, well . . . that's just the way it is," he wrote. "I believe that if you set up a nocturnal observation camera at that location, you probably would wind up with footage of this animal, probably within a few days." Several readers posted comments suggesting that the animal might have been a fisher or a stoat. "Not wishing to be dogmatic, in my mind it was simply a lemur," James responded.

"I decided to report the sighting, against the urgings of my wife, who thought that I would get a reputation as a nut," James explained in a recent e-mail. "I assume, if people start making fun of me for seeing a lemur, other people will step forward and say, 'I saw something, too.'" No such luck yet.

Boston lemur?

Andrew Mudge, when reached by phone recently, assumed the call to be a prank. "Let me get this straight: you're calling me about the lemur I saw in 2002?" he asked. "Which one of my friends put you up to this?" Mudge then recalled that he'd received an e-mail from a man named Bill James, but hadn't paid it much attention. "I just remember having this gut feeling that this animal does not belong in this part of the world," he wrote in an e-mail, thinking back to his sighting. "Ironically, I was leaving the house to go to a Red Sox game when this happened."

—*Ben McGrath*

HOME EC DEPT.
SOUP TO NETTLES

In 1861, the year Tsar Alexander II freed the serfs, Elena Molokhovets published her domestic bible, "A Gift to Young Housewives, or the Means of Lowering Household Expenses." She explained how to feed the servants, how to pick the freshest meat, how to measure precisely in a culture that still cooked by instinct, how to plan six hundred meals of varying attendance, cost, and life-cycle significance. (A breakfast for one's name day, for example, should include a turkey galantine, a cold French pâté, a well-sauced duck or goose, beef tongue, fried fowl, rice, radishes, two salads, pastries, coffee, rum, and, of course, more pâté.) A half century later, by the time the Bolsheviks had overthrown Alexander's heirs, the book had been printed in thirty-odd editions, most of them overseen by Molokhovets herself, all while rearing ten children, writing religious tracts, and running her own hearth with utmost efficiency.

The once ubiquitous and bourgeois "Gift to Young Housewives" all but disappeared in Soviet times, but it resurfaced this summer in Red Hook. Valerie Stivers-Isakova, a young, American, and very pregnant housewife, received it as a gift from the mother of her Russian-born husband, Ivan. Inspired, Stivers-Isakova, a writer, decided to have a Molokhovets-themed dinner party.

First, the menu. For a June dinner "of the first order," Molokhovets recommends starting with a soup of puréed game or wild mushrooms, accompanied by "strong Spanish wines," lobster-stuffed pastries, and pirozhki with brains, "served in their shells." The dinner should then proceed through eight more courses: filet of beef with a knockwurst butter paired with a nice Saint-Julien or a warmed Lafite; sturgeon and potatoes served with a Sauternes or a Chablis; young carrots, turnips, potatoes, and cabbage in a cream sauce, "divided on the platter with strips of pastry"; lobster soufflé; a wild-strawberry Imperial punch; braised capon stuffed with liver and truffles; strawberry ice cream; and, finally, berries with black coffee, tea, and cognac.

After hours of translation, Stivers-Isakova decided to ditch the vegetable dish with what she termed "fancy dough receptacles." She also figured that she was inviting too many vegetarians to serve so much meat. In the end, she said, "I decided to go for the spirit of the thing."

She started with the poultry. "We tried to make the veal-stuffed duck, and it was a total disaster! We deboned it, we even sewed it closed, and it just came out looking ridiculous," Stivers-Isakova recalled, posing, elbows out, in homage to the ill-fated mallard (Recipe No. 894). "Molokhovets just says, 'Cook till it's done.' What does that mean? What vessel do you use? What temperature?"

A peach tart turned out soggy; rice-and-egg pastries too dry. Stivers-Isakova went hunting for nettles at the Union Square Greenmarket, called Court Street butchers looking for kidneys and veal bones, and scoured the Red Hook Fairway for elderberry juice. The nettles were the worst. Six stinging bushels had to be cleaned, boiled, drained, blanched, wrung, chopped, and reduced, finally, to a small pile you could hold in your hand. "I had four pots going," Stivers-Isakova said. "I had to wear ziplock bags on my hands."

Stivers-Isakova cooked for three days. When her twelve guests finally arrived, on a Saturday night, the meal got under way with smoked fish (from Russ & Daughters) and pickles (prepared in Russia by Ivan's mother, using Recipe No. 3,287), accompanied by shots of cold vodka. Cutting into a chicken cutlet (Recipe No. 846), Alix Alferieff Murdoch, a law student, recalled how her Kentuckian mother had tried to re-create a traditional Orthodox Easter dinner for her Russian-émigré husband. "She lost the recipe for kulich"—a dense Easter cake—"and could never remember—was it twenty eggs? Twenty-two eggs?" (Molokhovets, in Recipe No. 2,472, recommends ten.)

After the sorrel-and-nettle soup (Recipe No. 2,032) and fish in champagne aspic (a variation on Recipe No. 1,249), the guests wandered over to look at the Statue of Liberty, visible through the dining-room windows. Anya Ulinich, a writer and a Russian immigrant, tried to give Stivers-Isakova some advice, young housewife to young housewife.

"I really want my kid to speak Russian," Stivers-Isakova said, balancing a slice of rum torte with jam (Recipe No. 1,944) on her belly. "Ivy says he's going to speak Russian to the kid, but I don't believe him. So I'm going to hire a nanny who only speaks Russian."

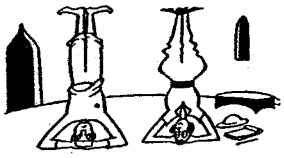
"But you know the problem with Russian nannies, don't you?" Ulinich said. "You need a nanny who speaks no English, and if she speaks no English she'll be older than you, in which case she'll become your surrogate mother. She'll constantly be freaking out: 'Oh, my God! How can you give the child cold milk straight from the fridge!'"

Stivers-Isakova remained confident that she'd build a fine nest, even if it is a hybridized version of the one Molokhovets envisioned. What did she think of the book, in the end?

"It's an instrument of torture."

—*Julia Ioffe*

FITNESS DEPT.
KRANKING IT



First, there was krumping, the spasmic, freestyle hip-hop dance out of South Central L.A. You probably weren't much good at it. It went global anyway. You might have it confused with crunk. That's hip-hop, too. Southern, thumping, also fast. Usher had a hit with it a few years back.

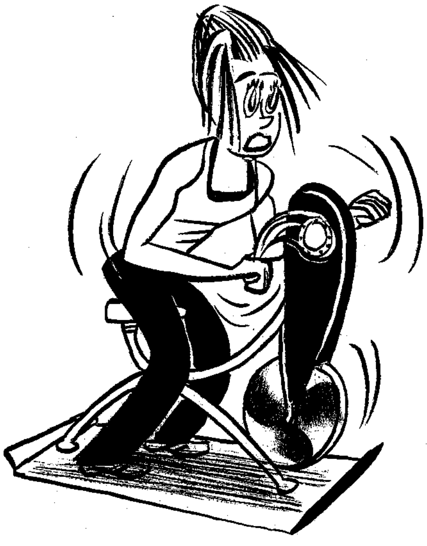
O.K. Now it's time to krank. This is not hip-hop. But it's going to be huge. To experience Kranking®, you'll need a Krankcycle®, and, for the moment, one of the few places you can find one in New York is at the Reebok Sports Club/NY, on Columbus Avenue. Avery Washington offers introductory classes. Picture ten Krankcycles in a mirrored room—they're stationary arm bikes, basically, with just a seat, a suspended front wheel, and hand-pedals where handlebars normally go. On a recent morning, half a dozen women were Kranking, hands whirling in front of them, while a mixtape of Danzel, Janet Jackson, and Miguel Migs pounded from Washington's pink-shelled iPod. Washington, an extensively muscled man wearing a red bandanna, and a certified Kranking instructor, was chanting, "Left, synch it, a little faster, come on, this is where you get the cardio, nice and smooth, right on, nice transition, left and right, both arms working together."

Why will Kranking be huge? Because, for a start, Johnny G invented it. The last fitness program he invented was Spinning® (stationary bicycling in a group, basically). Spinning went beyond platinum, worldwide, and Johnny G, né Goldberg, rode the craze, which is still going, for all it was worth. He registered every Spinning-related trademark you can think of, did a licensing deal with Schwinn, and then sold it all, along with the instructor-certification program (a hundred and fifty thousand instructors in eighty countries), in 2005. Kranking is his comeback.

"It will be a slowish rollout," Johnny G said, on the phone from California. "We'll be in forty countries by March. I'd love to have ninety thousand units out there in the next three, four years. Then we'd be helping a lot of people."

Helping people is Johnny G's not-so-secret mission. As he writes in "Kranking® Trainer Philosophy," a brief essay for the Krankcycle Web site, "It is my wish that all teachers and students realize their importance as human beings and strive for health, peace, wisdom, and success." Johnny G is fifty-one, a former endurance cyclist, and speaks with a South African accent. There was traffic roaring in the background. He was sitting, he said, on a dune overlooking the Pacific Coast Highway.

The inspiration for the Krankcycle hit him in 2002, at a fund-raiser for chal-



Kranking

lenged athletes. "There were a couple of legless people and, at the foot of the stage, a fourteen-year-old kid with a homemade hand cycle," he said. "He was tenacious. So I had a go, and was absolutely exhausted in ten minutes." The next frontier in the fitness business, Johnny G realized, was the upper body. He spent several years, and more than half a million dollars, developing and refining the Krankcycle.

Who came up with the name?

"I did," he said proudly. "Came up with the spelling myself. The universe blessed me." He gave a big, unironic laugh.

Back to Kranking class. (Come on, synch it.) Although Avery Washington makes it look easy, Kranking is not yet pulling in the crowds at Reebok Sports Club/NY. It could be the superficial resemblance to some onerous early-industrial assembly-line task—the sort of hard, silly-looking repetition that used to destroy a worker's body in six months. It looks, let's admit it, masochistic. Washington tried to mix it up for his group—"stand up, come round front, add some resistance, bounce into it a little"—but he admitted that he might need to mix it up more. "I think I'll add jump ropes next week," he said.

During a break, an older woman, slightly wild-eyed, came over. "I'm knocking all the time," she said. She was talking about having trouble getting the Krankcycle to turn smoothly. "It's driving me nuts. I love it, but I'm so upset about the knocking."

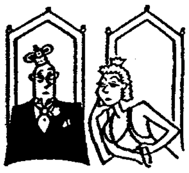
Washington said, "You need to be in synch or you get that knocking." This could be another possible disincentive. Johnny G himself mentioned "dealing with the clunk of the krank arm."

You will be good at Kranking. It won't be like krumping. You will realize your importance as a human being, and Kranking will be key. Krankcycles, by the way, won't be sold through infomercials. They will be available to chiropractors and physiotherapists, but primarily they will be integrated into your workout through the certified gym-instructor network that has helped make Spinning what it is.

That means Avery Washington. He mainly teaches Spinning and body sculpt, which is also known as definition. "Every place calls everything different," he said evenly.

—*William Finnegan*

DEAR DIARY DEPT.
THE CROSS-EYED QUEEN



In May, a tiny, exquisite volume went on display at the Morgan Library & Museum: a prayer book made for Queen Claude of France, who was born in the penultimate year of the fifteenth century. Claude, a near-contemporary of Anne Boleyn, who served her at the French court as a prepubescent lady-in-waiting, was betrothed at the age of six to her cousin François, the Duke of Angoulême and heir-presumptive to the French throne. She was wed at fourteen. She went on to bear seven royal children, including a son who became Henry II of France, and she died at twenty-four.

"The French say that she was *épuisée*—exhausted," Roger S. Wieck, a curator of medieval and Renaissance manuscripts at the Morgan, explained the other day. Wieck has been studying Queen Claude's prayer book ever since the museum received it, as a gift, a few months ago, from Mrs. Alexandre P. Rosenberg, whose late husband was an art dealer and collector of illuminated manuscripts. (Inside, on the front flyleaf of the prayer book, is one of Mr. Rosenberg's bookplates, which were designed for him by Picasso.) The book, which is bound in red velvet and has two golden clasps, is smaller than a credit card, and includes fifty-two folios, painted front and back with a hundred and thirty-two miniature illuminations drawn from the Bible and the lives of the saints.

The name of the artist, of whose works only about a dozen survive, is lost to history, but scholars speak of the Claude Master, because of the quality of this, his greatest work. His palette tends toward soft roses and mauves—in an image of the Virgin's coronation, Christ and his mother wear matching amethyst-colored gowns, trimmed in gold—and the brushwork is stippled, as if it were the effort of a mouse-size Seurat. "It's an amazing creation," Wieck said. "And, of course, Claude's eyes were very young."

It is not known who commissioned the prayer book, but, Wieck explained as he stood in Mr. Morgan's library, where the book is being displayed in a Plexiglas case usually reserved for a Gutenberg Bible, he is beginning to think it was the Queen herself, to commemorate her coronation. The only heraldic crests within its folios are Claude's, rather than those of her husband. Another clue, Wieck said, was the representation of a golden cord, tied with loose knots, that encircles the image of the Holy Trinity. In the early sixteenth century, these knots would have been a giveaway symbol for the House of Savoy, to which Claude's husband, François, belonged. "She is trying to say that François is my father, son, and Holy Ghost," Wieck said. "She adored her husband. He adored her much less."

Claude's ascent to the French throne was the result of dynastic wrangling. She was the firstborn child of Louis XII of France, but, as a woman, was ineligible to be crowned monarch; she could, however, inherit the title and estate of her mother, Queen Anne, Duchess of Brittany. Claude's marital desirability was considerably greater than her personal attractions. "Nobody liked Claude, because she was short, fat, lame, slightly hunchbacked, and cross-eyed," Wieck said. François, on the other hand, was dashing and handsome, and among those rumored to have been his mistress was Mary Boleyn, Anne's sister.

Claude sought her consolations elsewhere. The prayers and stories in the book, the pages of which are worn at the edges, seem to have been chosen with Claude's particular circumstances in mind. A full eighteen pages are devoted to the life of the Virgin Mary—who, like Claude, was expected to give birth to an important boy. More obscurely suggestive are other, more gruesome images: St. Apollonia having her teeth pulled out; Sts. Denis, Peter, Paul, and John the Baptist being decapitated. One particularly nasty tale is that of three children being chopped up by an innkeeper before having their pickled bodies restored by St. Nicholas. Claude's book is unusual for the period in actually depicting the bloodied children, cowering in their bed under the innkeeper's axe.

On the book's final flyleaf is a sixteenth-century marking, in Spanish. Wieck explained, "The Inquisition said it was O.K."

—*Rebecca Mead*

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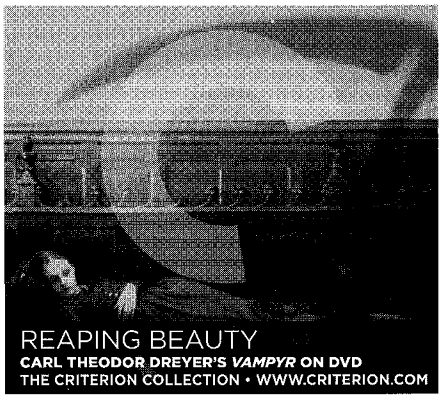

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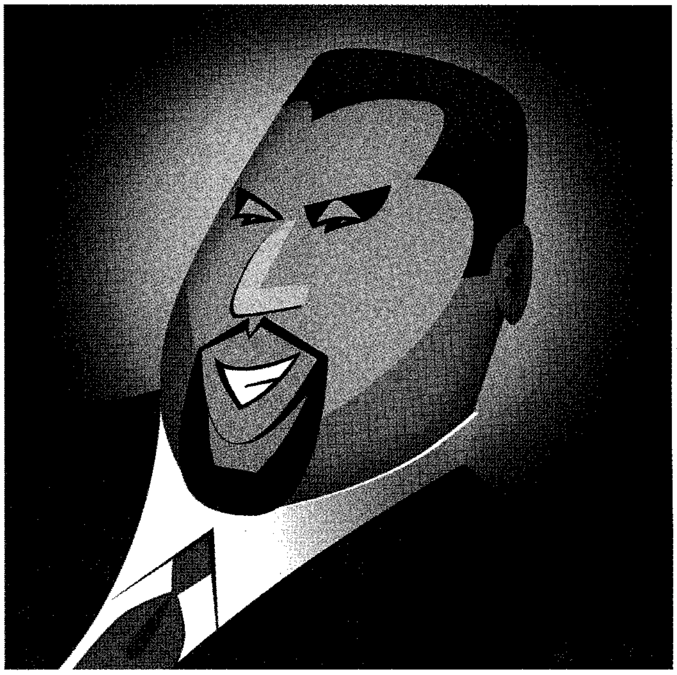
THE POLITICAL SCENE

WHAT HE KNOWS FOR SURE

Tavis Smiley confronts the Obama candidacy.

BY KELEFA SANNEH



Smiley cautioned about "the hysteria and the hype" surrounding Barack Obama.

Twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, for twelve years, "The Tom Joyner Morning Show" came to a halt so that Tavis Smiley could hold forth. The show, which supplements R. & B. songs and comedy skits with listener call-ins and lots of good-natured banter, claims to have eight million listeners, making it the most popular radio broadcast in black America. Joyner, who once sang in a group with Lionel Richie, is a gregarious host with a high, wheezing chuckle, and he presides over a gently irreverent gang. Smiley, who hosts his own nightly talk show on PBS (in many markets it airs after "Charlie Rose") and a weekend radio show distributed by Public Radio International, is a gifted orator and a budding media mogul: in an era that would seem to have little need for an old-fashioned black advocate, he has made himself just about impossible to ignore. On the "Morning Show" his job was to provide the uncomic relief. He said, "When I come on, they stand down." The sidekicks were shushed, the sound effects silenced, and the music faded out so that Smiley could deliver a secular sermon, a rat-a-tat treatise on politics and the black community.

Smiley's first commentary of the year was broadcast on Tuesday, January 8th, and his subject was Senator Barack Obama, who had won the Iowa caucuses the previous week. Joyner had emerged as an ardent Obama supporter, but Smiley, in his commentary, urged listeners not to be taken in by "the hysteria and the hype." He said, "You can't short-circuit the process of holding folk accountable just because you fall in love."

The phone calls and e-mails started immediately. Listeners couldn't understand why Smiley was speaking out against a man who could be the first black President. On his next show, he acknowledged the "pain, anguish, anger, and disappointment," but he didn't back down. And although he criticized Senator Hillary Clinton's campaign in the following weeks, dissatisfaction with Obama was often the focus of his commentary. He was disgusted by the idea that the Senator "transcends race"—"Nobody asks white candidates to transcend *their* race," he said. And he worried that, for some people, "voting for the guy who happens to be black might be the easy way out."

On February 11th, Obama called in to the show. He seemed to be stifling a sigh when Joyner asked him about Smiley's criticism. "I'm gonna have to call Tavis up and straighten him out on this," he said. "I don't know why he hasn't called me directly." The Senator added that he was a supporter of Smiley's agenda: "There is no issue that he's discussed—whether it's health-care discrepancies for minorities or what have you—that isn't central to my campaign."

At the end of the month, Obama declined to attend the State of the Black Union symposium, an annual gathering of thinkers and politicians which Smiley has organized for a decade, and which this year was held in New Orleans. The event, which is broadcast on C-SPAN, is meant to publicize the concerns of black America, while providing a forum for leaders to discuss solutions. The symposium also underscores Smiley's role on the political stage. This year's participants included civil-rights veterans (Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton), academic celebrities (Michael Eric Dyson, Cornel West), congresswomen (Stephanie Tubbs Jones, Sheila Jackson Lee), and one Presidential candidate: Hillary Clinton. "It was a bad decision for him not to show up," Smiley later said of Obama.

Some of Smiley's critics voiced a suspicion that pride, not principle, was motivating him. In a much debated column published by TheRoot.com, an online African-American magazine owned by the Washington Post Company, Melissa Harris-Lacewell accused Smiley of "throwing a temper tantrum." Above a rather unflattering photograph of Smiley on the set of "Meet the Press," a headline evoked not only indignation but puzzlement, too: "Who died and made Tavis king?"

On April 10th, Joyner got a phone call from Smiley, who said he wanted to leave the show. "It hit me so hard," Joyner says now, and after a sleepless night he took to the airwaves to blast his listeners for driving Smiley away. Joyner turned this soliloquy into a blog post. "He can't take the hate he's been getting regarding the Barack issue," Joyner wrote, and he asked his listeners to persuade Smiley to stay: "I want you to call him, e-mail him, text him, hug him, kiss him, get him in a corner and wrestle him."

It didn't work. The next week, Smiley announced that he would move on in June, when his contract expired. But he wasn't leaving because of the Obama controversy, he said; he just wanted to "pursue certain other passion projects." He reaffirmed his love for Joyner's audience, and for Joyner himself. "I'd take a bullet for Tom Joyner," he said, but added playfully, "Not in my heart. Maybe in my arm. My *left* arm."

ROBERT RISKO

Tavis Smiley lives in a neat, well-appointed house in the elegant Los Angeles neighborhood of Hancock Park. (He enjoys telling guests that Nat King Cole integrated the neighborhood in the nineteen-fifties.) At forty-three, he is stocky and seemingly tireless, like an athlete, although his waistline reflects the fluctuating results of the ongoing battle between his allegiance to his trainer and his fondness for dessert, which he usually orders with an extra scoop of ice cream. He has never been married, and says, "I don't have kids, because I have tried to be responsible—knock on wood." He doesn't drink, and his nights out tend to be purposeful (concerts, ballgames, plays) and relatively short, though he is quick to explain that he has options. One evening, he reported that he had just received a message from Quincy Jones. "T, it's Q," he said, doing an impression of Jones's stentorian voice. "Naomi"—Naomi Campbell—"is having a party tonight and she's using my house." Smiley thought about it, or pretended to, before deciding not to go. "Three o'clock in the morning is gonna be an early call," he said.

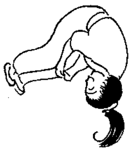
Three o'clock was when he got up on Joyner days to make the five-mile drive south to the Smiley Group headquarters, in the middle-class South Central neighborhood of Leimert Park. It's a one-story building on Crenshaw Boulevard, wedged between a veterinary clinic and a burger joint, with a grand entry flanked by spindly twin shrubs. Smiley paid for the construction himself, because banks saw the neighborhood as high risk. When the building was finished, in 2001, he enumerated on Joyner's show the banks that had turned him down. The story he tells usually ends with "a parade of white men" coming down Crenshaw to apologize.

At five o'clock on a Tuesday morning a few weeks before he left the show, Smiley was hunched over a legal pad in his office, which is filled with Smiley memorabilia. (In one corner, a plastic case holds two of the Starbucks paper coffee cups—No. 257 in the company's "The Way I See It" series—that bear a quote from Smiley: "Love wins.") It was primary day in North Carolina and in his home state, Indiana, and he was organizing notes for his "Morning Show" commentary, which he read live.

Around five-fifteen, he ambled into the studio, exchanged a few long-distance words with Joyner, who broadcasts from Dallas, and, in an authoritative cadence that is not much different from his normal speaking voice, started talking. He reminisced about Indiana, and though he said he was excited about the state's unexpected turn in the political spotlight, he pointedly—and perhaps unnecessarily—announced that he himself had no plans to run for President. "This President thing, it can't be all that," he said. "Especially if it means that black people and black suffering have to be rendered invisible." He talked about the importance of hope, but added a qualifier: "Even hope needs help."

After he signed off, he went next door to the control room to see Sheryl Flowers, his longtime producer, who played his commentary back to him. When he heard himself say, "Hope needs help," he leaned forward. "That could have been taken as a tacit endorsement for Obama," he said. Flowers, who maintains an air of fond skepticism, said that she didn't think so. Later, he asked whether the commentary could be criticized for being "too much Tavis." She paused. "That's a possibility," she said.

The Smiley Group has about seventy employees, and at around twelve-thirty Smiley convened a meeting in his office with a half-dozen staff members, presiding over the group with pride and evident enthusiasm. He no longer swears, having been chastened years ago by an engineer who secretly recorded a profane rant, burned it onto CDs, and distributed them to Smiley's colleagues. But he gets a lot of mileage out of "golly," a word he modifies by elongating the first syllable and stressing the second one, which gives it the same general shape as an extended "God *damn*." Another one of his favorite words is "Negro." He sometimes uses it to express disdain, as when he told an audience, "Optimistic Negroes scare me." At other times, he uses it to express humble camaraderie with fellow African-Americans; he described the black population of Hancock Park as "me and two or three other Negroes." At one point during the meeting, he wondered "how many Negroes" were likely to attend a high-school forum that was being proposed. One of his staff corrected him: "Or whatever color"—all races were welcome. Smiley shrugged. "Negro is a universal term, for me," he said.



The Smiley Group, which was created a decade ago, has grown into a sprawling tribute to its founder's independent streak. He publishes some of his books through SmileyBooks and arranges his own lecture tours—his standard fee is in the mid-five-figure range—through his High Quality Speakers Bureau, which also represents Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Jackie Joyner-Kersee, among others. At the meeting, he got updates about Tavis Smiley Presents, which organizes conferences, symposia, and speaking tours of black colleges, and about the nonprofit Tavis Smiley Foundation, which hosts a weeklong summer camp known as the Leadership Institute. And he briefed his lieutenants about his next big venture, "America I AM," a travelling museum exhibition on black history, in partnership with Arts and Exhibitions International—"the King Tut people," he said.

During a discussion of next year's State of the Black Union symposium, the tenth, to be held in Los Angeles, Smiley confirmed that Prince, whom he befriended several years ago during a lunch meeting (he is an accomplished befriender), had agreed to play a concert. And he reacted with mock outrage when it was suggested that he celebrate the anniversary by throwing himself a party. "The Prince party is enough, y'all," he said, laughing. "Come on!"

Tavis Smiley grew up poor, in a Pentecostal household in white rural Indiana. He was raised, alongside nine siblings and cousins, by a stern mother and a quiet but tough Air Force-officer father who was actually, he discovered when he was twelve, his stepfather. As with many kids of his generation, his life was changed by a stack of Motown LPs, but these were recordings of great speeches by Martin Luther King, Jr., released on a Motown imprint called Black Forum Records. Smiley memorized his favorite orations, paying particular attention to King's rhetoric and intonation. He decided that he would follow King's example, although he didn't know exactly how. "Since I was twelve or thirteen," Smiley says now, "I wanted to get started on this thing—this Kingian kingdom-building."

In his autobiography, "What I Know For Sure" (2006), written with David Ritz, Smiley remembers a boyhood confrontation with a bully, from which he extracted what he saw as an important lesson: "It was far better to confront those who oppressed me head-on, I realized, than to allow them to demean and disrespect me." In the years that followed, Smiley found oppressors closer to home: his parents. His stepfather once beat him so badly, he says, that the police intervened and placed him in foster care, where he remained for almost half a year. He filled his high-school years with debate tournaments, student-government meetings, and an internship in the office of a Kokomo city councilman. His mother periodically forced him to prune his schedule and focus more on the church; in response, he cut himself off from her throughout much of his high-school career.

By his senior year, Smiley was barely speaking to either of his parents, but he got accepted at Indiana University, in Bloomington, and an African-American administrator helped him find the right loans and jobs. In Bloomington, he encountered a broader African-American culture. He saw his first movie, Richard Pryor's "Live on the Sunset Strip," and fell in love with Frankie Beverly and Maze, an R.&B. group that never crossed over—"The band belonged to the black community," as he put it. He was a director of minority affairs for the student government, and he joined a black fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi, although he says he had to pray about the decision—King had been an Alpha Phi Alpha. He remembers wondering, "How am I gonna tell Dr. King one day, when I meet him in Heaven, that I pledged Kappa?"

The case of Denver Smith, an African-American student who was killed during a confrontation with police, propelled Smiley further toward politics (he helped organize protests), but he wasn't a radical. In 1985, during his junior year, he lobbied hard for an internship with Tom Bradley, the first African-American mayor of Los Angeles. When he was rejected by one of Bradley's assistants, he sent a handwritten letter, with apologies for any smudges caused by "the tears rolling down my face," to Bradley himself, who finally invited him to Los Angeles. Some students might have been disillusioned by all the meetings and committees, but Smiley loved to think that he was helping to run the city.

At the end of the summer, he returned reluctantly to Bloomington, though he didn't stay long enough to graduate. (He finally got his bachelor's degree in 2003, after completing a correspondence course at the university which required him to write about his own books.) By 1987, he was back in Los Angeles, where he worked as an aide to Bradley, then made an unsuccessful run for the city council. He next campaigned, also unsuccessfully, to become the president of the local chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, King's old organization.

During this time, Smiley noticed that there was a whole industry of people who got paid to talk and, even better, to opine. He conceived of a show called "The Smiley Report," and persuaded the owner of an AM radio station to let him unburden himself in sixty-second installments. His focus was meat-and-potatoes black-community issues: police brutality, affirmative action, poverty. He quickly moved from AM to FM, from FM to cable, and from cable to KABC, Channel 7. In 1996, at a White House gathering for black media professionals, he met Tom Joyner, who was looking for ways to boost black participation in that year's Presidential election. Smiley suggested that regular political commentary might get listeners motivated to register and vote, and he was hired.

Smiley likes to say that his motto is "Learn, leave, launch," but he admits that the leaving hasn't always been voluntary. Also in 1996, BET gave him his own show, "BET Tonight with Tavis Smiley," and between Joyner and BET the exposure made him a black celebrity. He had a series of warm conversations with President Bill Clinton, who evidently saw the show as a sympathetic forum—he gave Smiley his first interview after admitting to his dalliance with Monica Lewinsky. But in 1999 Smiley got into trouble with Bob Johnson, BET's founder, for telling *Newsweek* how "frustrating" it was "to be asked by young black people how I can work for a company with no social consciousness." He survived that controversy, but two years later he angered Viacom, BET's parent company, by selling ABC an exclusive interview with the former Symbionese Liberation Army member Sara Jane Olson. (He landed the scoop when Olson's daughters, who happened to be BET viewers, suggested him to their mother.) Smiley was fired, but he remembers the incident with pride, saying that it continues to be seen as "one of the big blunders in BET history." (Johnson said at the time that he was firing Smiley for "a number of public and private concerns.")

Smiley rebounded with a daily show on NPR, but walked away in 2004, because, he says, NPR wasn't doing enough to widen its audience of "educated white people." (Or, put another way, it wasn't doing enough to promote Smiley's show.) On PBS and PRI, Smiley is an independent producer, not an employee, and this arrangement suits him better.

The PBS show, "Tavis Smiley," which is aimed at a general audience, can be dull. (Smiley doesn't have much to say to movie stars, though he excels with politicians.) But the PRI show, "The Tavis Smiley Show," which is, he says, "designed primarily to reach out to people of color," is looser and better, perhaps because the guests are often wonks, academics, or activists—his kind of people. Smiley's best friend, Cornel West, the Princeton professor and public intellectual, makes regular appearances—during an episode taped shortly before Mother's Day, West began by singing a snippet of the Intruders' 1973 hit, "I'll Always Love My Mama." Smiley asked West—whom he calls Doc—about the bond between black men and their mothers. "We're such a hated and despised people that unconditional love has tremendous weight and gravitas," West said.

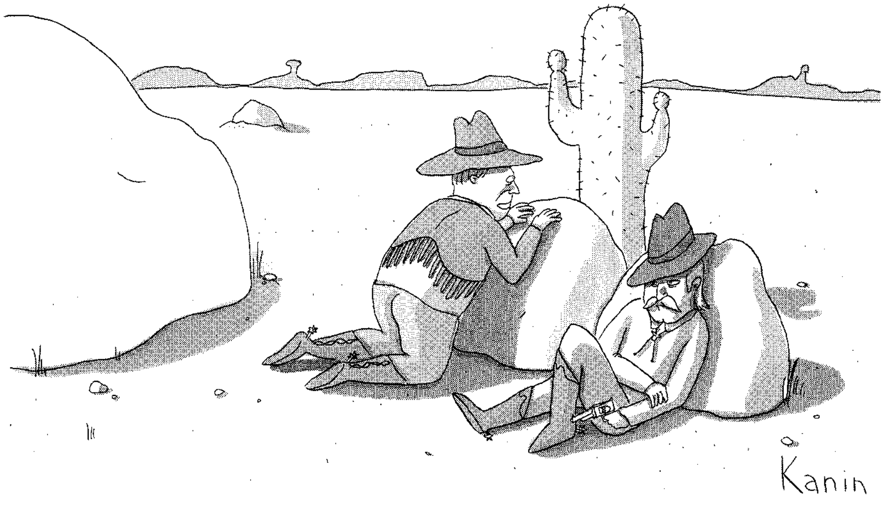
West and Smiley make an effective team: the tenured radical and the indefatigable entrepreneur, united by twin commitments to black politics and intellectual populism. Smiley likes to joke that he stalked West for a while after they first met, at the Los Angeles headquarters of the S.C.L.C. in the mid-nineteen-eighties, but West says, "Once I got to know this brother, I started stalking *him*." West now has his own room in Smiley's house, and in the summer they travel the world together, booking just enough lectures to get their expenses paid. At a dinner this spring in Connecticut, where Smiley was giving a commencement address, he listened in awe and amusement as West held forth on Japanese socialism, obscure funk bands, and the drinking habits of Richard Wright ("nothin' but cognac"). Their friendship sometimes seems like a free-floating seminar, and in a sense it marks Smiley's unlikely return to the academic life he left behind.

In 1996, Smiley published a book called "Hard Left: Straight Talk About the Wrongs of the Right," but the title was slightly misleading. He has never really been a culture warrior, and the book now reads like a mild-mannered response to the partisan battles of the time. In 2006, he organized "The Covenant with Black America," a collection of essays and calls to action by activists and scholars. The book, which topped the *Times* best-seller list, is studiously unpolemical, full of practical advice. (Altogether, he has written or orchestrated twelve books, as well as two decks of "Empowerment Cards.")

Smiley learned how to leverage Joyner's huge audience, and in this regard his work sometimes seems like a continuation of the nineteen-seventies campaigns of Jesse Jackson's Operation PUSH: he petitions and challenges politicians and corporations on behalf of black America. In 2002, he led a letter-writing campaign opposing Charles W. Pickering's confirmation to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. (Pickering had reduced the sentence of a white man convicted of burning a cross on the lawn of an interracial couple.) And he and Tom Joyner used public pressure, including the threat of a boycott, to force the electronics retailer CompUSA to respond to charges that, even though African-Americans were avid computer users, the company was underspending on advertising in black media outlets. (This, of course, was a case where political and business interests overlapped.)

Unlike Cornel West, Smiley has never had much patience for theoretical investigation. He often talks about his "love affair" with black people, and he calls his black-college tours "Talented Tenth," after W. E. B. Du Bois's famous essay from 1903, which began with a ringing proclamation: "The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men." A century later, that notion might seem hopelessly paternalistic, and Smiley is often criticized for positioning himself as the latest in a long line of "exceptional" African-Americans.

But Smiley instinctively understands the sentimental appeal buried in Du Bois's formulation. In Smiley's vision of black America, the Talented Tenth comprises just about everyone within earshot. It's a club—a movement, really—that anyone can join, and its appeal is probably stron-



"Those idiots, they're burning their own arrows! Oh—oh, God no."

“What if we don’t like their country personas?”

• •

gest to people who aren’t customarily invited to think of themselves as heirs to the intellectual legacy of Du Bois, or, for that matter, of anybody else.

Smiley is a liberal, but he avoids potentially divisive issues, such as abortion and gay marriage, saying that he has nothing new to add. And while he often criticizes President Bush’s prosecution of the war in Iraq, foreign policy isn’t his specialty, either. He presents himself as a committed but relatively nonideological broker, bringing together influential people who are dedicated to making life better for Americans of African descent.

Smiley is also a broker in a different sense: a branding and partnership specialist. He offers companies a chance to position themselves as supporters of black political uplift without courting controversy. Nearly every project at the Smiley Group has had its own underwriters, from the college tour (Anheuser-Busch, Toyota) to the State of the Black Union symposium (Wells Fargo, ExxonMobil). “There are no perfect companies,” Smiley often says. In 2004, he invited H. Lee Scott, the president and C.E.O. of Wal-Mart, which sponsors “Tavis Smiley” (and sponsored the “Morning Show” commentaries), to appear on the PBS show. Smiley began by quoting e-mails from three viewers, one of whom told him he was being used as a “little black pawn.” Then he noted that Wal-Mart was “still No. 1” on *Fortune’s* list of the most admired companies in America. He asked Scott, “Who’s right? These three people who wrote these e-mails or *Fortune*?”

Earlier this year, Smiley announced a three-year deal with Nationwide, the insurance and investment-services company. Nationwide supports the PBS show and is a national sponsor of the 2009 State of the Black Union symposium; the deal also includes a five-city tour to promote “economic empowerment and financial literacy.” The first stop on the tour, in May, was Columbus, Ohio, where Nationwide is based.

The Columbus *Post*, a black weekly, made the visit its lead story, under the headline “SMILEY: TIME FOR ACTION!” And at a Friday-night jazz reception at M, an upscale restaurant, Jerry Jurgensen, Nationwide’s C.E.O., talked about how greater “financial literacy” could have prevented the housing crisis, and how it could help get kids through high school and into college.

The next day, there were posters all over the Greater Columbus Convention Center, each one with a photograph of Smiley, an arrow, and the words “This way to Tavis.” Publicists guided Smiley through a series of quick radio interviews and photo opportunities, and then into a ballroom, which held a few hundred people, nearly all African-American, with Nationwide executives sitting in the front row. Smiley spoke about the importance of insurance by talking about unpredictable tragedies, from the cyclone in Myanmar to Hurricane Katrina, and the audience murmured its assent. “Don’t tell me that we don’t live in a world of uncertainty,” he said, and someone called out, “That’s right!” He used the Bible, James 4:17, to explain the importance of financial planning: “To those who know to do good, or to do right, and doeth not, to them it is”—and the crowd finished for him—“Sin!” Smiley feigned surprise. “Ooh,” he said. “Some of y’all didn’t want to hear that s-i-n word.”

Then he gave out his e-mail address, saying that if anyone had trouble with Nationwide he would intervene. “If they dis you,” he said, “send me an e-mail.” He also found a way to address any lingering doubts about Nationwide’s motives, or his. “I know why they’re doing this—because y’all got money,” he said, to laughter and applause. “White folk don’t ever come to us just because they like us. They come because they like making money. And I ain’t mad at ’em for making money. I like making money, too. That’s why I ain’t here for free.”

For Smiley, as for most power brokers, politics is a tangled web of alliances forged and broken, complicated, perhaps, by his own short, unhappy political career. For a time, he seemed to be on Obama’s side. On July 29, 2004, two days after Obama delivered his galvanizing speech at the Democratic National Convention, in Boston, he paid a visit to Smiley’s PBS show, and although Smiley seemed enthusiastic about Obama’s new prominence, there was also a hint of uncertainty. “I heard Pat Buchanan say that you were great,” Smiley said ominously. (He added, a bit skeptically, “Folk are trying to make you the next President, after that speech the other night.”) Last October, Obama sat down again with Smiley, who wanted to know, among other things, why

Obama wasn't doing better among African-Americans—a poll that month showed Hillary Clinton holding a twenty-four-point lead over Obama among African-Americans.

But after Obama won the Iowa caucuses his African-American support grew. Smiley tried to appear neutral: when he talked to Tom Joyner's audience on Thursday, May 8th, two days after the primaries in Indiana (which Clinton won, narrowly) and North Carolina (which Obama won, broadly), he was careful to praise the candidates evenly. But his audience was evidently not evenly split. Exit polls revealed that Obama won about ninety-two per cent of the black vote in Indiana and ninety-one per cent in North Carolina.

In this climate, Smiley's refusal to embrace Obama was all the more conspicuous. (In fact, Obama's overwhelming support in black America may have helped stiffen Smiley's resolve—to his credit, he loves being loved less than he hates being told what to think.)

But Smiley's complicated feelings about Obama's campaign can't be reduced to perceived slights and biases. In the 2004 Convention speech, Obama talked about his Kenyan father, who "got a scholarship to study in a magical place, America, that shone as a beacon of freedom and opportunity to so many who had come before." To Smiley, this sounded dangerously naïve. "I love America," he said, "but this ain't Disneyland. There's nothing 'magical' about America." In quieter moments, Smiley often strikes a note of concern about whether, after the campaign, Obama's "soul will be intact." One night, driving through Los Angeles with a friend, the actor Wren T. Brown, Smiley said, in a soft voice, "We are going to have to keep that brother at the top of our prayer list. As the old folk say, 'Keep that Negro on the altar.'"

This is an idea often expressed by Obama's African-American supporters: Obama must be kept safe from harm and true to himself. True to his people, too. But, as a matter of strategy, Obama had to avoid being marginalized as the black candidate. Michael Eric Dyson, speaking at this year's State of the Black Union forum, essentially asked African-Americans to trust that Obama had their best interests at heart. "Barack Obama will take his race into account. He is rooted in but not restricted by his blackness," Dyson said. "He's winking at Negroes, hollering at white folk, trying to bring us all together."

There is also the awkward fact that Obama has become the most popular politician in black America with relatively little help from the black leaders who have spent years or decades consolidating their bases of power. Some have registered misgivings about Obama's movement, which took shape in a matter of months, organized around no particular political imperatives (at any rate, none that seemed very different from those of his main rival). Cornel West is both a supporter and a critic: he pronounced himself "deeply disappointed" by Obama's decision not to travel to Memphis to observe the fortieth anniversary of King's death, but he also says that Obama's candidacy is "our last hope, in a way." Jesse Jackson recently (and inadvertently) revealed himself to be a supporter-critic, too, when he was caught on camera castigating Obama for "talking down to black people." And in an eloquent essay posted on the liberal Web site TalkingPointsMemo.com, the Brown University economics professor Glenn Loury argued that Obama's candidacy—especially his speech about race—constituted a kind of negotiation. African-Americans were being asked to give up their anger for the vague promise of "a more perfect union." If Obama was implicitly promising to leave behind the old recriminations, well, that, for Loury, was precisely the problem. He wrote, "My fear is that, should Obama succeed with his effort to renegotiate the implicit American racial contract, then the prophetic African-American voice—which is occasionally strident and necessarily a dissident, outsider's voice—could be lost to us forever."

On June 26th, Smiley interrupted Joyner's show for the last time. "Every word that I have ever uttered in this sacred space is born of a deep and abiding love for black people," he said. He didn't mention Obama. Joyner now says he accepts that Smiley isn't leaving because of the Obama controversy. "Tavis did not quit because he was supporting Hillary Clinton," Joyner says. "That's the perception. But in our business perception is everything."

Maybe it's fitting that Smiley's run on Joyner has ended now. He would have a hard time pretending to be torn between Obama and John McCain. And if he sounded a bit glum in the last few weeks of the primary maybe that's why: he realized that the threat of a Clinton resurgence was his last bit of leverage, his last opportunity to get Obama to sit down and talk about his—Smiley's—agenda, on his own terms.

Among African-Americans, in particular, an Obama victory in November would probably be celebrated as if it were a national holiday. (Even Smiley says, "If the brother wins, I'm gon' be on the front line of the electric slide—I'm gon' be there celebrating, like everybody else.") But it could also be traumatic for anyone who makes a living talking about or to—or, especially, for—black America. Black leaders who opposed him might find themselves, as Smiley did, dissidents in their own communities. Bitter intra-racial debates over the policies of our first black President could only make the notion of a singular black community seem that much more illusory, emphasizing schisms that many black leaders have been at pains to ignore.

One day, after taping a series of interviews for PBS, Smiley decided to unwind by taking in a basketball game. It was Game 2 of the Western Conference Semifinals, the Los Angeles Lakers against the Utah Jazz, and Smiley was installed in a luxury box at Staples Center, the Lakers' home arena. Just about everyone in the building seemed to be wearing identical yellow commemorative T-shirts—Kobe Bryant had just received the M.V.P. trophy—and the Lakers were putting on a cool, confident performance that made the night seem more like a coronation than a contest. He is a longtime Angeleno, and no fan of the Jazz, but he declined to join in the jubilation. Only when Utah pulled to within six points, halfway through the fourth quarter, did he truly seem engaged. "I just love a good game," he said. "I *hate* blowouts." ♦

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Kelefa Sanneh talks about Tavis Smiley.

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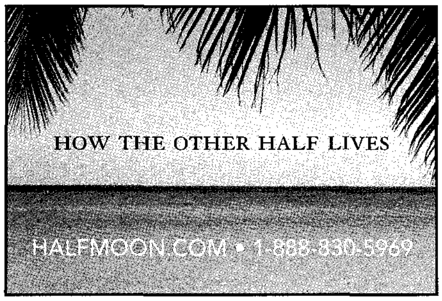

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LETTER FROM INDIA

SERVING THE GODDESS

The dangerous life of a sacred sex worker.

BY WILLIAM DALRYMPLE

"Of course, there are times when there is pleasure," Rani Bai said. "Who does not like to make love? A handsome young man, one who is gentle . . ."

She paused for a moment, looking out over the lake, smiling to herself. Then her face clouded over. "But mostly it is horrible. The farmers here, they are not like the boys of Bombay."

"And eight of them every day," her friend Kaveri said. "Sometimes ten. Unknown people. What kind of life is that?"

"We have a song," Rani said. " 'Everyone sleeps with us, but no one marries us. Many embrace us, but no one protects.' "

"Every day, my children ask, 'Who is my father?' They do not like having a mother who is in this business."

"Once, I tried to open a bank account with my son," Rani said. "We went to fill in the form, and the manager asked, 'Father's name?' After that, my son was angry. He said I should not have brought him into the world like this."

"We are sorry we have to do this work. But what is the alternative?"

"Who will give us jobs? We are all illiterate."

"And the future," Kaveri said. "What have we to look forward to?"

"When we are not beautiful, when our bodies become ugly, then we will be all alone."

"If we live long enough to be old and to be ugly," Kaveri said. "So many are dying."

"One of our community died last week. Two others last month."

"In my village, four younger girls have died," Kaveri said. "My own brother has the disease. He used to be a truck driver, and knew all the girls along the roads. Now he just lies at home drinking, saying, 'What difference does it make? I will die anyway.' "

She turned to face me. "He drinks anything he can get," she said. "If someone told him his own urine had alcohol in it, he would drink that, too." She laughed, but harshly. "If I were to sit under a tree and tell you the sadness we have to suffer, the leaves of that tree would fall like tears. My brother is totally bedridden now. He has fevers and diarrhea." She paused. "He used to be such a handsome man, with a fine face and large eyes. Now those eyes are closed, and his face is covered with boils and lesions."

"Yellamma never wanted it to be like this," Rani said.

"The goddess is sitting silently," Kaveri said. "We don't know what feelings she has about us. Who really knows what she is thinking?"

"No," Rani said, firmly shaking her head. "The goddess looks after us. When we are in distress, she comes to us. Sometimes in our dreams. Sometimes in the form of one of her children."

"It is not the goddess's doing."

"The world has made it like this."

"The world, and the disease."

"The goddess dries our tears," Rani said. "If you come to her with a pure heart, she will take away your sadness and your sorrows. What more can she do?"

We had come to Saundatti, in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, to see the goddess Yellamma—Rani Bai, Kaveri, and I. (The names of the two women have been changed.) We had driven over that morning from the town of Belgaum, through the rolling green plains of cotton country. The women, who had been dedicated to Yellamma when they were children, normally took the old slow bus to visit her temple, so they had jumped at the chance to make the journey in the comfort of a taxi.

It was hot and muggy, not long after the end of the rains, and the sky was bright and cloudless. The road led through long avenues of ancient banyan trees, each with an intricate lattice of aerial roots. As we neared Saundatti, however, the green tunnel came to an end, and the fields on either side gave way to drier, poorer country. Trees, cane breaks, and cotton fields were replaced by strips of sunflowers. Goats picked through dusty stubble. Women in ragged clothing sold onions laid out on palm-weave mats set along the side of the road. After some time, a long red stone ridge appeared out of the heat haze. The ridge resolved itself into the great hogback of Saundatti, and at the top, rising from near-vertical cliffs, was the silhouette of the temple of Yellamma. Below, and to one side, stretched a lake of almost unearthly blue.

It was here, according to legend, that the story had begun. Yellamma was the wife of the powerful *rishi* Jamadagni. The couple and their four sons lived in a simple wooden hermitage by the lake. Here the sage punished his body and performed great feats of austerity. After the birth of his fourth child, these included a vow of chastity. Every day, Yellamma served her husband, and fetched water from the river for her husband's rituals. She used a pot made of sand, and carried it home in the coils of a live snake.

One day, as Yellamma was fetching water, she saw a heavenly being, a *gandharva*, making love to his consort by the banks of the river. It was many years since Yellamma had enjoyed the pleasures of love, and the sight attracted her. Watching from behind a rock, and hearing the lovers' cries of pleasure, she found herself longing to take the place of the beloved.

This sudden rush of desire destroyed her composure. When she crept away to get water for her husband, she found, to her horror, that she could no longer create a pot from sand, and that her yogic powers of concentration had vanished. When she returned home without the water, Jamadagni guessed what had happened, and in his rage he cursed his wife. According to Rani and Kaveri, within seconds Yellamma had become sickly and ugly, covered with boils and festering sores. She was turned out of her home, cursed to wander the roads of the Deccan, begging for alms.

Jamadagni belongs to that class of irascible holy men who fill Sanskrit literature with their fiery and unforgiving anger. In contrast, the goddess Yellamma, like Sita in the Ramayana, is a victim, suspected of infidelities she never committed, rejected by all. Though the story is full of sadness and injustice, devadasis—as those who have been dedicated, or "married," to a god or a goddess are known—believe that the tale shows how the goddess is uniquely sympathetic to their fate. After all, their lives often resemble hers: they are cursed for crimes of love outside the bonds of marriage, rejected by their children, condemned like Yellamma to live on the roads, begging for favors, disfigured by sadness, and without the protection of a husband.

I got a glimpse of the tensions in the devadasi's life when we arrived in Saundatti. We had gone to a tea shop near the lake, at my suggestion. Devadasis are a common sight in Saundatti, where they often beg in the bazaars on Yellamma's holy days of Tuesday and Friday. But they don't usually brave the tea shops on the main street.

The devadasi system is centuries old, and the women once enjoyed lives of great privilege. Photograph by Ima Garmendia.

Long before the glasses of hot sweet chai arrived, the farmers at the other tables had started pointing at Rani Bai, and gossiping. They had come from their villages to sell cotton at the market, and, having got a good price, were now in a boisterous mood. Although Kaveri and Rani Bai had the red *tikka* of a married woman on their foreheads, Rani Bai's *muttu*—the necklace of red and white beads that a devadasi wears—and her jewelry, her painted face, and her overly dressy silk sari had given her away.

Kaveri had once been beautiful, but the difficulties of her life, and the suffering she had endured, had aged her prematurely, and she no longer attracted attention. Rani Bai was different. She was in her late thirties, at least ten years younger than Kaveri, and was still, undeniably, lovely. She was tall and long-limbed, and had a large mouth, full lips, a firm brown body, and a lively manner. She did not keep her gaze down, as Hindu women generally do in the villages; instead, she spoke in a loud voice, and every time she gesticulated about something—and her hands were constantly dancing about as she talked—her bracelets rattled. She wore a bright-lavender silk sari, and had rings sparkling on each of her toes and up the curve of each ear. The farmers sat there as we sipped our tea, looking at her greedily. Before long, they were noisily speculating about the relationship she might have with me, the *firangi*, and her cost, what she would and would not do, and wondering where she worked and whether she gave discounts.

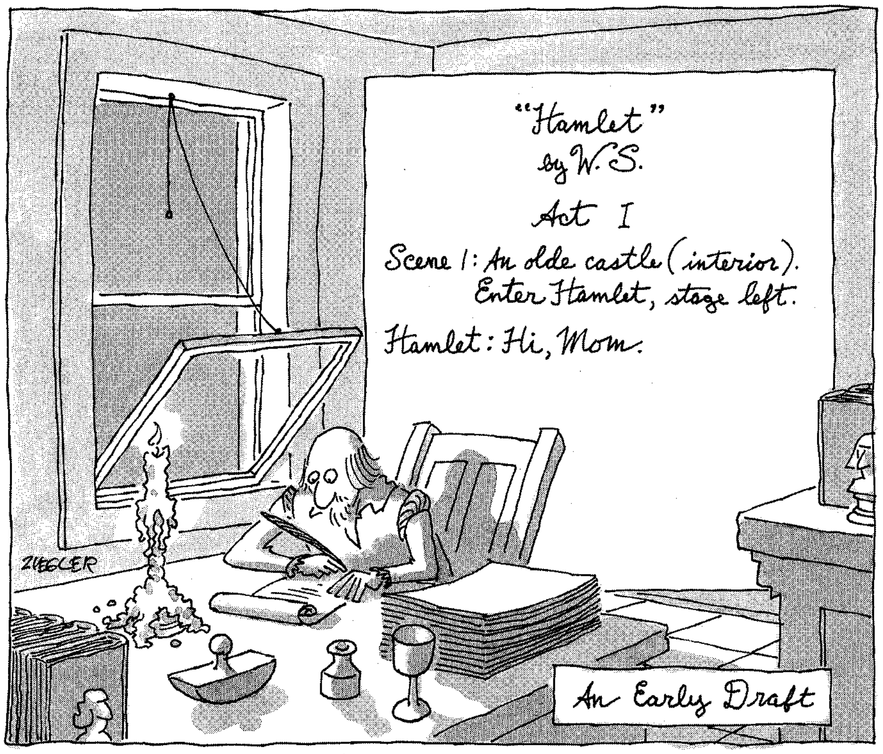
Rani had been telling me in the car about the privileges of being a devadasi, about the way people respected her, how she was regarded as auspicious and was called even to upper-caste weddings to give her blessings. So when we finally fled the chai shop, to a chorus of laughter and bawdy remarks, her mood changed. As we sat under a banyan tree beside the lake at the edge of the town, she became melancholy, and she told me how she had come to this life.

"I was only six when my parents dedicated me," she said. "I had no feelings at the time, except wondering: why have they done this? We were very poor and had many debts. My father was desperate for money, as he had drunk and gambled away all that he had earned and more, and he said, 'This thing will make us rich, it will make us live decently.'

"At that age, I had no devotional feelings for the goddess, and dreamed only of having more money and living a luxurious life in a *pucca* house with a tile roof and concrete walls. So I was happy with this idea, though I still didn't understand where the money would come from, or what I would have to do to get it.

"Soon after I had had my first period, my father sold me to a shepherd in a neighboring village for five hundred rupees"—about thirty-eight dollars at the time—"a silk sari, and a bag of millet. By that stage, I knew a little of what might lie ahead, for I had seen other neighbors who had done this to their daughters, and saw people coming and going from their houses. I had asked my parents all these questions, and repeated over and over again that I did not want to do sex work. They nodded, and I thought they had agreed. But, one day, they took me to another village on the pretext of looking after my sister's newborn baby, and there I was forcibly offered to the shepherd. I was only fourteen years old.

"It happened like this. The night we arrived with my sister, they killed a chicken and we had a great feast with rotis and rice—all the luxuries even the rich could dream of. Then my mother went home to her village, and I went to sleep with my aunt. I was asleep when the man came, around nine.


"Hamlet"
by W.S.
Act I
Scene 1: An olde castle (interior).
Enter Hamlet, stage left.
Hamlet: Hi, Mom.
ZIEGLER
An Early Draft

"I realized something was going to happen and started crying. But my aunt, who was also a devadasi, said, 'You should not cry. This is your dharma—your duty, your work. It is inauspicious to cry.' The man was about twenty-two, and very strong. My aunt left the house, and I tried to kick him and scratch him, but he took me by force. After that, he cheated me and never gave the full five hundred rupees he had promised my father. Though I had given my body to him, he used me, and then cheated me.

"The next morning, I shouted at my aunt. I said, 'You are a whore and you have made me into a whore.' She just laughed at me. Often, I still curse my mother. Because of that woman, my life has been wrecked. For two years, I was very upset, and we did not talk. During that time, I refused to do any sex work. Instead, I worked in the onion fields here, earning fifty paise"—thirty-seven cents—"a day.

"Eventually, I went to Bombay with my devadasi aunt, who had promised to show me the city. We went by train, and I was very excited, as it was my first visit. I did not know that I would be tricked again. But when we arrived she took me straight in a rickshaw to a brothel. There she handed me over to the *gharwalli*—the madam—who was a friend of hers.

"The *gharwalli* was very sly. She gave me lots of sweets and chocolates, and introduced me to all the other girls. They were all dressed up in fine clothes and good saris with amazing jewelry on their wrists: I had never seen so much gold or so much silk! In fact, I had never seen anything like this on any woman in Belgaum. I thought this was the good life. The *gharwalli* offered my aunt two thousand rupees for me, as I was very good-looking, but she did not ask me to do any *dhanda*"—sex work—"at first, and let me take my own time. That first month, all I had to do was help cook and clean the house, and I was happy with that. I liked Bombay. I ate fabulous biryani at the Sagar Hotel, and once when I was in the streets I saw Amitabh Bachchan"—the Bollywood matinée idol—"pass by in his car.

"Before long, a rich man came and saw me at my duties, cleaning the house. He refused all the other girls and just demanded to have me. I was scared, as he was very hefty, very fat. So, instead, the *gharwalli*, who was very clever, sent some younger boys to me. They were lean and good-looking, and a nice match for me. Eventually, I agreed to sleep with one of them. They were very sensitive with me, not like the men here. We didn't use a condom—I didn't know about them in those days.

"Eventually, I agreed to take the big man. He offered five thousand rupees for me, and the *gharwalli* gave me half. Two thousand five hundred rupees! It would have taken me twenty years to earn that picking onions in my village, and I wasn't even a virgin—I was already used goods. So I stayed, and even though I got some diseases that first year, I remained in that house for four years.

"By that time, I had had my first two children—a daughter and a son—and it was partly for them that I went back to my village. I lived with my mother, and for the last eighteen years I have done *dhanda* in our house in the village. After some time, I got a lover—a big man locally. He has a family—a wife, two sons, and two daughters—and used to give me money. With him, I had a second daughter. He wanted more children by me, and I didn't. That was how we eventually parted, even though we had been happy together.

"I have been lucky and I've made good money. I can still earn two hundred to three hundred rupees from a single client. It's true that I sometimes feel this is not dignified work. There is a lot of insecurity. But I have looked after and married off my sister, I feed my mother and my son, and I now have eight acres of land with the money I have earned. On it, we keep four buffalo and four bullocks. Thanks to the generosity of the goddess, I will escape this work when I have saved some more, and live by selling the milk and curd from the animals."

I asked what had happened to her daughters.

"One was a singer. She eloped when she was fourteen. She came back a year later, but no one would marry her. So she became a devadasi."

"And the other?"

"The other had some skin disease and had white patches on her thighs. We went to many doctors, but they could not cure it. Like her sister, she found it hard to get married, so I had to dedicate her, too."

"But how could you do that when you were so angry with your own mother for dedicating you? You just said yourself this is undignified work."

"My daughters scolded me," Rani Bai admitted, "just as I scolded my mother."

"Didn't you feel guilty?"

"I didn't like it," Rani said. "But there was no alternative."

"Where are they now?" I asked. "Here? Or in Bombay?"

There was a long pause when I asked this. Then Rani said, simply, "I have lost them."

"What do you mean?"

"Both have passed away. Maybe it was because of some sins in a past life that the goddess cursed me in this way. One lost weight and died of a stomach disease. The other had fevers."

I later learned that Rani's daughters had had AIDS. One died less than a year ago, aged fifteen. The other was seventeen, and died six months later.

The devadasis stand in the direct line of one of the oldest institutions in India. The word comes from Sanskrit: *deva* means "god" and *dasi* means "a female servant." At the heart of the institution lies the idea of a woman entering for life the service of a deity. The nature of that service and the name given to it have wide regional variations and have changed through time; only recently have most devadasis come to be working in the sex trade.

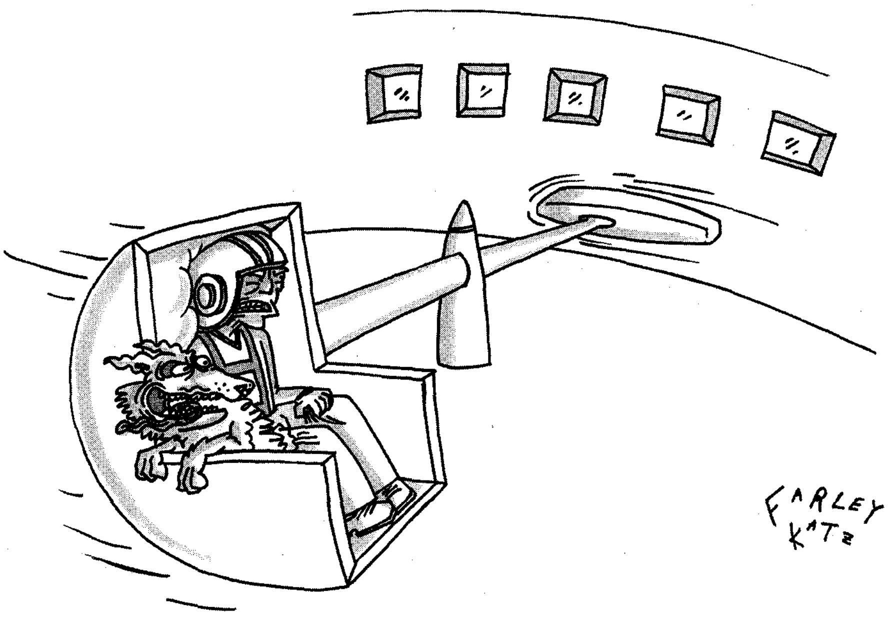
Some experts trace the institution to the ninth century; others maintain that it is far older, and claim that what is arguably one of the most ancient extant pieces of Indian art, a small bronze of a naked dancing girl from Mohenjo-daro, dating to around 2500 B.C., could depict a devadasi. By the time of Asoka, in the third century B.C., a piece of graffiti in a cave in the Vindhya hills, in central India, recalls the love of Devadinna, an artist, who had fallen for "Sutanuka, a devadasi." There are large numbers of images of temple dancing girls and a few textual references to devadasis from the early centuries A.D. onward, including some in the area immediately around Saundatti. The largest collection of inscriptions, however, comes from the Chola temples, around Tanjore, in Tamil Nadu, where the great Chola kings of the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries boast of giving hundreds of devadasis, or *tevaratiyars*, to the temples they founded. These royal temples were conceived as palaces of the gods, and just as the king was attended by ten thousand dancing girls so the gods also had their share of devoted attendants. The vast entourages added to the status of rulers, whether heavenly or terrestrial, and were believed to surround them with an auspicious female presence.

Not all the "temple women" referred to in such inscriptions were necessarily dancing girls, courtesans, or concubines. Some seem to have been more like nuns, busy with devotions and temple-cleaning duties. Some had honored and important roles in the temple rituals.

In the sixteenth century, Portuguese traders from Goa began to visit the Hindu capital of Vijayanagar, in southern India, and they left fuller and more explicitly sensual descriptions of temple women. One Portuguese traveller wrote that women who belonged to the pagoda danced before the idol. The traveller went on:

> They give him food and all that is necessary, and all girls born of these women belong to the temple. These women are of loose character, and live in the best streets that there are in the city; it is the same in all their cities, their streets have the best rows of houses. They are very much esteemed, and are classed amongst those honoured ones who are the mistresses of the captains; any respectable man may go to their houses without any blame attaching thereto.

This partially sexualized nature of the temple women is similarly evident in the profusion of images of voluptuous temple dancing girls that cover the pillars of so many temples in the south. There is, moreover, a body of explicitly sexual poetry from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in southern India in which the love of a devotee for the deity is sometimes envisaged as being akin to the love of a temple dancing girl for her client. Some of the most famous of these poems were discovered carved, in an early form of Telugu, on copper plates and kept in a locked room in the temple of Tirupati;



it is only in the past decade that they have been translated into English, and included in the collection "When God Is a Customer." In most, the god is usually a form of Krishna; he is good-looking and desirable but a thoroughly unreliable lover who plays games that drive his devotees to despair. In other Telugu poems, however, the devadasi or courtesan sometimes dominates the relationship:

I'm not like the others.
You may enter my house,
but only if you have the money.

If you don't have as much as I ask,
a little less would do.
But I'll not accept very little,
Lord Kŏṅkaneśvara.

To step across the threshold
of my main door,
it'll cost you a hundred in gold.
For two hundred you can see my bedroom,
my bed of silk,
and climb into it.

Only if you have the money

To sit by my side
and to put your hand
boldly into my sari:
that will cost ten thousand.

And seventy thousand
will get you a touch
of my full round breasts.

Only if you have the money

Three crores to bring
your mouth close to mine,
touch my lips and kiss.

To hug me tight,
to touch my place of love,
and get to total union,
listen well,
you must bathe me
in a shower of gold.

But only if you have the money

These poems of union and separation may be read partly as metaphors for the longing of the soul for the divine, and of the devotee for God. Yet they are also clearly an expression of unembarrassed joy in sexuality, part of a complex cultural tradition in pre-colonial India where the devotional or metaphysical and the sexual are not regarded as being opposed; on the contrary, they are seen to be closely linked. The temple girls were auspicious, and the devadasis retain this auspiciousness in Karnataka today.

There is, however, an almost unimaginable gulf separating the devadasis of ancient poems and inscriptions and the lives lived by women like Rani Bai. In the Middle Ages, the devadasis were drawn from the grandest families in the realm—among them princesses of the Chola royal family—and possibly from slaves captured in war. Many were literate, and some were highly accomplished poets; indeed, at the time they seem to have been among the few literate women in the region. Today, the devadasis are drawn exclusively from the lowest castes—usually from the Dalit Madar caste—and are almost entirely illiterate.

The majority of modern devadasis in Karnataka are straightforward sex workers; the devadasis I talked to estimated that only about one out of twenty of those dedicated as children manage to escape into other careers—not least because almost all of them leave school and begin work soon after puberty. They usually work from home rather than in brothels or on the streets, and tend to start younger than commercial sex workers. Nevertheless, the main outlines of their working lives are in reality little different from those of others in the sex trade. This does not, however, stop the devadasis from drawing elaborate distinctions between their sacred vocation and the work of their commercial sisters, which they take great pleasure in looking down upon.

Ironically, it was partly well-meaning social reformers who contributed to this marked drop in status. In the nineteenth century, Hindu reformers, reacting to the taunts of Victorian missionaries, began to attack the institution of temple dancers and sacred prostitution. Successive waves of colonial and postcolonial legislation slowly broke the ancient links between the devadasis and the temples, driving the women out of the temple precincts and eroding their social, economic, and spiritual position. In 1982, the Karnataka Devadasis (Prohibition of Dedication) Act forced the practice completely underground, threatening any priest who assisted in ceremonies with years of harsh imprisonment. Around the lake, and on the road to the temple, the government has put up huge warning signs: "Do Not Dedicate Your Daughter. There Are Other Ways of Showing Your Devotion" and "Dedicating Your Daughter Is Uncivilized Behavior."

For all their efforts, the reformers have not succeeded in ending the institution. They have only demeaned and criminalized it. There are estimated to be around a quarter of a million devadasis in Maharashtra and Karnataka, about half of them living around Belgaum. For the very poor, and the very pious, the devadasi system can still be seen as providing a way out of poverty while gaining access to the blessings of the gods, the two things that the most impoverished crave.

This is why more than a thousand girls, usually between the ages of five and ten years, continue to be dedicated to the goddess annually. If the girls are dedicated when they are very young, they return to a normal childhood. When they reach puberty, they are wrenched from their lives and offered to the highest bidder to be deflowered.

Later that day, I visited the Yellamma temple with Rani Bai and Kaveri. It is a fine eleventh-century building, and was packed with pilgrims from across the state; we had to stand in line for some time to get a glimpse of the goddess. Ahead of us was a party of excitable eunuchs from Bijapur. The women had recovered their spirits and chatted with the eunuchs as they waited.

"I feel very devotional whenever I am here," Rani said.

"You feel her presence so strongly in her temple," Kaveri said.

"She is very near," Rani said.

"How do you know?" I asked.

"It's like electricity," she replied. "You can't see it, but you know it's there, and you can see its effects."

When we arrived before the idol, the priests blessed us with a camphor lamp, and Kaveri explained that the image of the goddess had emerged from the hillside. "No one made it," she whispered.

I asked one of the Brahmans whether they still performed devadasi dedications. The priest looked uneasy.

"What do we know of these women?" he said, glancing around for support from his fellow-pundits.

"We used to bless their necklaces," one of the older priests said. "Then give them back to them. But now that is illegal."

"That was our only role."

"What they do is their own business," the first said. "This is nothing to do with us."

That evening, after we dropped off Kaveri in Belgaum, I took Rani Bai back to her house, in a nearby town where many devadasis have settled. More than a hundred worked in a small warren of streets off the main highway heading to Bangalore.

Rani Bai's house was in a dark lane, lit by a single, dim street light. Dogs sat next to open gutters, and half-naked children played in the side alleys. It was perhaps the depressing nature of her surroundings that led Rani—always the optimist—to emphasize the positive side of her career.

"We still have many privileges," Rani said as we approached her house on foot—the lanes were too narrow here for the car. "If a buffalo has a calf, the first milk after the birth is brought to the devadasis to say thank you to the goddess. During the festival of Yellamma, the people bring five new saris to us as gifts. Every full moon, we are called to the houses of Brahmans and they feed us. They touch our feet and pray to us because they believe we are the incarnation of the goddess."

"This still goes on?" I asked, thinking of the attitude of the Brahmans at the temple.

"Still," Rani said. "When we are called for pujas like this, we feel very proud.

"There are so many things like this," she continued. "When a child is born, they make a cap for the baby from one of our old saris. They hope then that the love of Yellamma will be on that child.

"Also," she added, "unlike other women, we can inherit our father's property. No one ever dares curse us. And when we die the Brahmans give us a special cremation ceremony."

We stepped over a dog, sleeping half in, half out of an open sewer.

"You see, we are not like the ordinary whores," Rani said, as we finally got to her house. "We have some dignity. We don't pick people up from the side of a road. We don't go behind bushes or anything like that. We spend time with our clients and talk to them. We are always decently dressed—always wear good silk saris. Never T-shirts or those miniskirts the other women wear in Bombay."

We had arrived at Rani's door. Outside, suspended on the wall, was a cubbyhole stall selling cigarettes and *paan*. Her younger sister was sitting here, handing out individual bidis and other cigarettes to passersby. As Rani led the way in, she continued, "You see, we live together as a community, and all this gives us some protection. If any client tries to burn us with a cigarette or to force himself on us without wearing a condom, we can shout and everyone comes running."

Inside, everything was immaculate. The space was divided in two by a large cupboard that almost touched the shack's roof. The front half of the room was dominated by the large bed where Rani plied her trade. To one side, on a shelf, were several calendar pictures of the goddess. In the back of the room was

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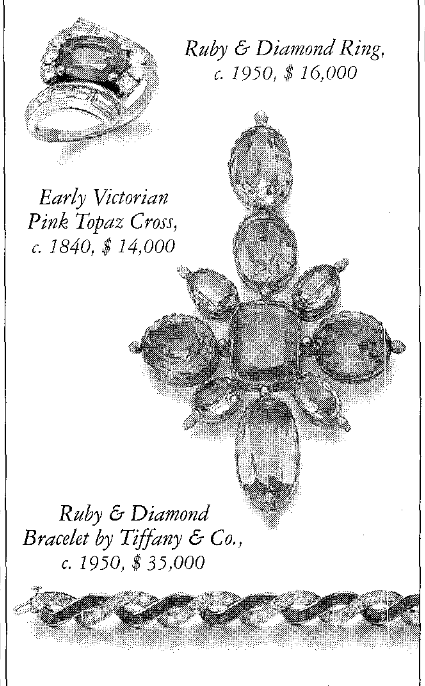

Ruby & Diamond Ring, c. 1950, $ 16,000

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a second bed—the one Rani slept in. Here were pots and pans, stacked neatly in racks, and below was a kerosene burner for cooking. On a cupboard was a large mirror and Rani's family photographs: pictures of her son and her old boyfriend—a handsome man with a Bollywood-film-star mustache and dark glasses—and beside that were passport-size shots of her dead daughters. Both were pretty girls, captured smiling when they were around twelve or thirteen.

Rani took the photographs from my hand, and replaced them on the cupboard. Then she led me back to the front half of the room and indicated that I should sit on the bed. I asked her whether her auspicious status made any difference to her clients when they came to be entertained.

"No," she said. "There is no devotional feeling in bed. Fucking is fucking. There I am just another woman. Just another whore."

"And do you feel safe from the disease here?" I asked. "Are you confident that the condoms can protect you?"

"No," she said. "There is always fear. We know that even if you persuade all your clients to wear a condom, one broken one can infect us. And once we are infected there is no cure. We will die—if not today, then tomorrow."

She paused. "You see, I know what it's like. I watched both my daughters die, as well as at least six of my friends. I nursed many of them. Some lost their hair. Some had skin diseases. Some just became very, very thin and wasted away. One or two of the most beautiful girls became so repulsive that even I did not want to touch them."

She shivered slightly. "Of course we feel very scared," she said. "But we must continue this work if we are to eat. We have a lot of misery to bear. But that is our tradition. That is our karma. We try to show our happy side to the clients to keep attracting them, and put all our efforts into doing a good job."

"Do you have any hopes for the future?"

"I am saving," she said. "As I told you, I have bought a little land, and one day, I hope, if I can get some more buffalo and a few goats, maybe I can save enough to retire there and live by selling the milk and curds. Yellamma will look after me."

"You know that?"

"Of course. If it wasn't for her, how could an illiterate woman like me earn two thousand rupees in a day? Yellamma is a very practical goddess. I feel she is very near. She is with us in good times and bad."

Later, I asked one of the project managers of an N.G.O. working in Belgaum about AIDS and how the devadasis' families reacted.

"It's terrible," she said. "The families are happy to live off them and use the money they earn. But as soon as they become infected, or at least become bedridden and sick, they are dumped in a ditch—sometimes literally. Just abandoned. We had a case before Christmas. One girl was taken to a private hospital in Bijapur after she complained of severe headaches. The hospital ran some tests and found that she was H.I.V.-positive and, on top of that, had a brain tumor. She began treatment, but her family checked her out because of the expense and took her home. We found her in a semi-comatose state, completely untended by the same family members she had been supporting for years. She wasn't even being given water. We took her straight back to the hospital ourselves, but it was too late. She died two weeks later."

"Then it's good that Rani will be retiring before too long," I said.

"That is what she told you?"

"She said she would get some land and some buffalo and try and make a living from that."

"Rani Bai?"

"Yes."

"I shouldn't really be telling you this," she said. "But Rani is infected—she's been H.I.V.-positive for eighteen months now. I've seen the tests."

"Does she know this?"

"Of course," she said. "It's not full-blown AIDS—at least, not yet. The medicines can delay the onset of the worst symptoms. But they can't cure her."

She shrugged. "Either way, it's highly unlikely she'll ever retire to that farm," she said. "It's the same as her daughters. It's too late to save her." ♦

CONSTABULARY NOTES FROM ALL OVER

From the Portola (Calif.) Reporter.

In Delleker, a caller reported that he sneezed 12 times.

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PLAY NICE

BY SIMON RICH

If adults were subjected to the same indignities as children . . .

PARTY

Zoe: Dad, I'm throwing a party tonight, so you'll have to stay in your room. Don't worry, though—one of my friends brought over his father for you to play with. His name is Comptroller Brooks and he's roughly your age, so I'm sure you'll have lots in common. I'll come check on you in a couple of hours. (*Leaves.*)

Comptroller Brooks: Hello.

Mr. Higgins: Hello.

Comptroller Brooks: So . . . um . . . do you follow city politics?

Mr. Higgins: Not really.

Comptroller Brooks: Oh.

(*Long pause.*)

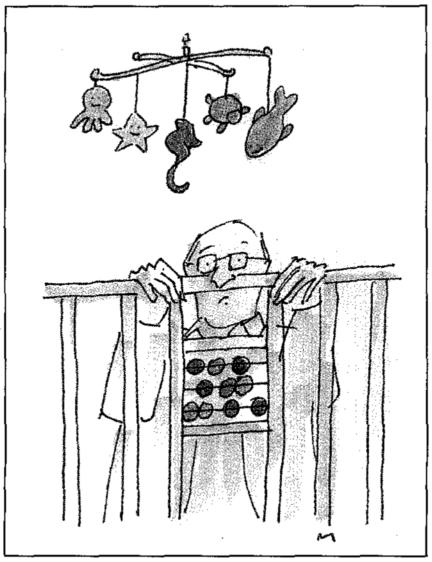
(*Zoe returns.*)

Zoe: I forgot to tell you—I told my friends you two would perform for them after dinner. I'll come get you when it's time. (*Leaves.*)

Comptroller Brooks: Oh, God, what are we going to do?

Mr. Higgins: I know a dance . . . but it's pretty humiliating.

Comptroller Brooks: Just teach it to me.


MICHAEL CRAWFORD

CAPITOL HILL

Lobbyist: If you fail to pass this proposition, it will lead to the deaths of thousands. Any questions?

Senator: Why are you wearing a sailor suit?

Lobbyist: My children decided to dress me this way, on a whim. I told them it was an important day for me, but they wouldn't listen.

Senator: It's adorable.

Lobbyist: O.K. . . . but do you agree with the proposition? About the war?

Senator: Put on the cap.

GARAGE

Lou Rosenblatt: Can I drive your car? I'll give it back when I'm done.

Mrs. Herson: I'm sorry, do I know you?

Lou Rosenblatt: No, but we're the same age and we use the same garage.

Mrs. Herson: No offense, sir, but I really don't feel comfortable lending you my car. I mean, it's by far my most important possession.

Brian Herson: Mom, I'm surprised at you! What did we learn about sharing?

Mrs. Herson: You're right . . . I'm sorry. Take my Mercedes.

Lou Rosenblatt: Thank you. Can I come over to your house later? I'm lonely and I don't have any friends.

Mrs. Herson: Well . . . actually . . . I kind of had plans tonight.

Brian Herson: Are you *excluding* him?

Mrs. Herson: No, of course not! (*Sighs.*) Here's my address, sir. The party starts at eight.

Lou Rosenblatt: I'll show up a little early.

Mrs. Herson: What's that on your face?

Lou Rosenblatt: Mucus. I haven't learned how to blow my nose yet, so I just go around like this all the time.

Mrs. Herson: Oh.

Lou Rosenblatt: I'll see you soon, inside your house. ♦

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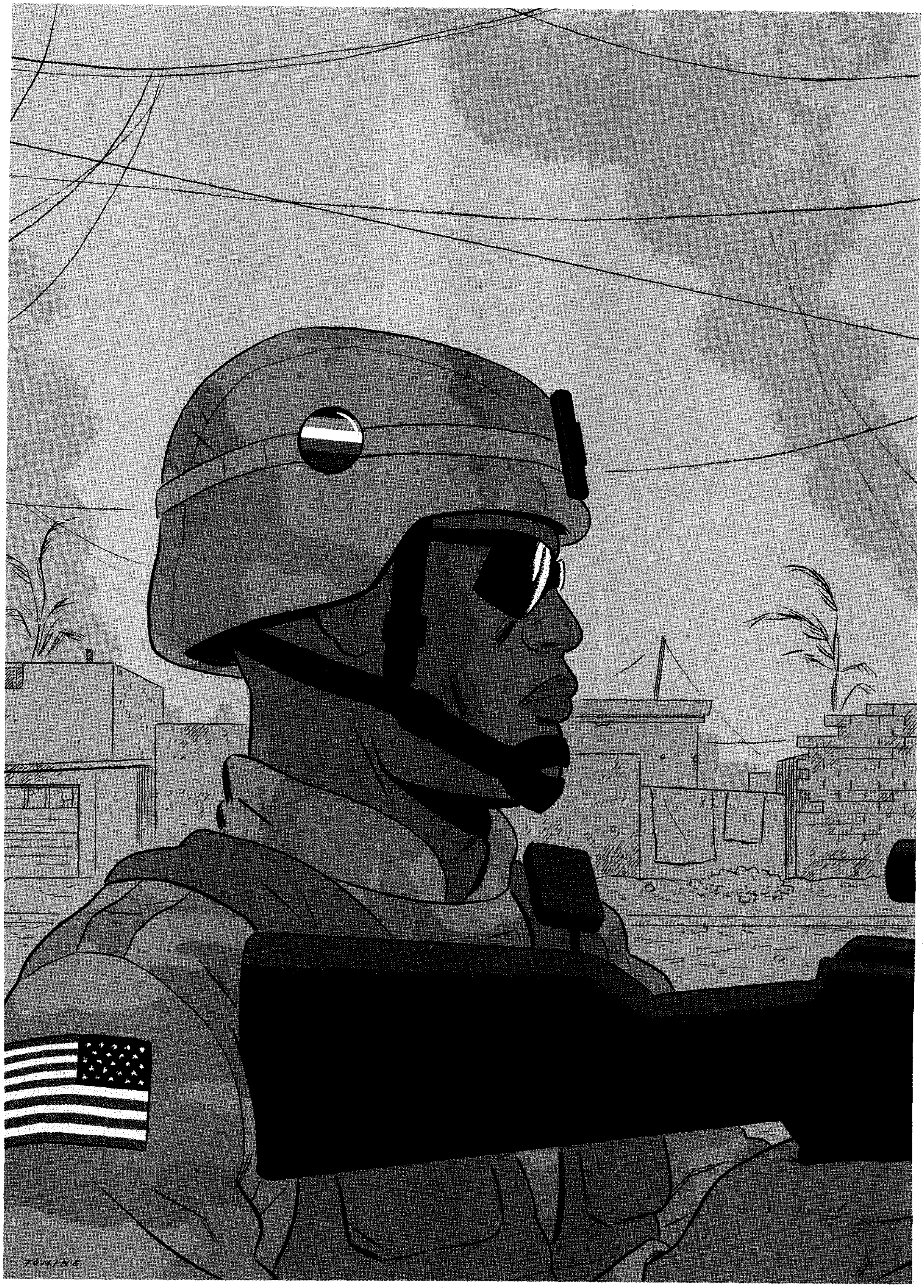


Rogers's singular gift may have been his ability to read the anxieties of others, and offer a suitable version of himself to fit the situation.

THE MILITARY LIFE

A SOLDIER'S LEGACY

Don't ask, don't tell, but Alan Rogers was a hero to everyone who knew him.

BY BEN McGRATH

In a handwritten letter to himself, dated December 13, 1990, Specialist Alan Rogers, a twenty-three-year-old African-American chaplain's assistant, grappled with the issue of fear as he prepared for his first combat tour. Aboard Flight 104 from Germany to Saudi Arabia, as part of Operation Desert Shield, he wrote, "It seems like only yesterday that we were initially alerted that our unit would be deploying to the Persian Gulf to support the multinational force buildup already operating in the Middle East theater. Yet, in the midst of all the preparations and briefings, frenzied activity and excitement, there exists a general feeling of numbness. This really isn't happening . . . this world crisis is not going to affect me. . . ." Rogers was an unusually soft-spoken and cerebral enlistee—he'd been voted "most intellectual" in his high-school class—and he found himself replaying the lyrics to Diana Ross's "Theme from Mahogany" in his head ("Do you know where you're going to?").

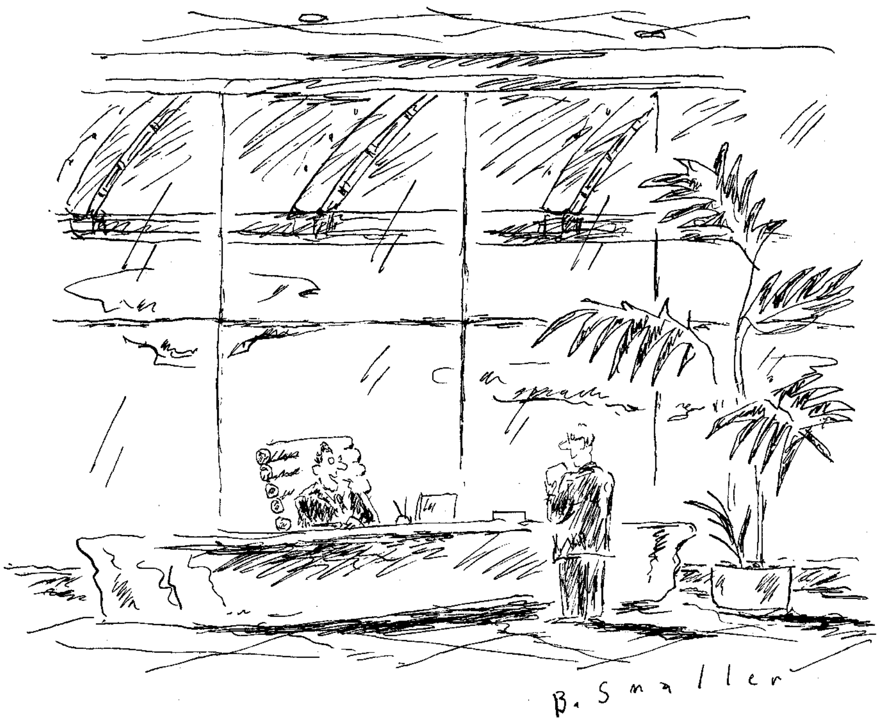
Rogers went on to a distinguished military career. After earning two Kuwait Liberation medals with the 8th Battalion, 43rd Air Defense Artillery, which provided Patriot-missile support against Saddam Hussein's Soviet-made Scuds, he returned home and, on an R.O.T.C. scholarship at the University of Florida, earned his bachelor's degree, in religion. Then he accepted a commission as an intelligence officer. While stationed in Arizona, as an aide-de-camp at Fort Huachuca, he received a master's degree in organizational management from the University of Phoenix, and later, after serving two tours in South Korea, and returning to the Middle East in 2002 for the initial phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom, he pursued a second master's, in policy management, at Georgetown. The Georgetown stint was part of an élite Defense Department internship program offered to twenty captains across the services, and it included an assignment to the Pentagon—in Rogers's case, as a special assistant to the Deputy Secretary of Defense, Gordon England. After the internship, he worked at the Pentagon as the lead biometrics officer in Army Intelligence—"the stuff that you see on 'C.S.I.: Miami,' " as one of his friends put it, referring to the use of advanced fingerprinting techniques and retinal scans, which are particularly useful in counterinsurgency warfare, and in tracking the sources of improvised explosive devices, the primary killer of U.S. troops. Biometrics was a notorious mess, but Rogers excelled in the role, owing in large part to his facility for reconciling the technological demands of civilian contractors with the Army bureaucracy. "Every biometrics staff in the Pentagon and beyond—every single one, and I'm not joking here—contacted me and asked if they could borrow Major Rogers to help them work out their biometrics problems," his supervisor later recalled. "Every meeting—fights, pandemonium—heads would turn to Alan."

The measure of a soldier can fairly be said to consist of his ability to maintain the respect of his peers and his subordinates while earning it anew from his superiors. Rogers rarely talked about himself, which helped contribute to a widespread sense among his troops that he was there "solely for them," as one Pentagon colleague said recently, but he was also fearless when it came to briefing two- and three-star generals. "If the sun was coming up and Alan said, 'You know, it's still kind of dark outside,' people would say, 'Yeah, maybe it *is* kind of dark outside,' " the colleague recalled. Rogers was deeply attracted to the symbolism of the Army, frequently leading civilian friends on tours of the Pentagon and of Arlington National Cemetery, and after he began his third tour in Iraq, last December, he took note of the weather in Baghdad, which wasn't so different from Florida's, and declared, "This is an ideal time to be here." Major Rogers was by then approaching twenty years' service, and was on track to be eligible for promotion to lieutenant colonel. He believed in the nobility of the mission.

In Baghdad, Rogers was assigned to the 1st Division National Police Transition Team, which involved embedding with Iraqi military units in an effort to train them for eventual self-sufficiency. He was part of an eleven-man unit known as Team Stiletto, working closely with several Iraqis who were nicknamed Steve, Mike, Leo, Kiwi, and Dave. "It is an understatement to say this is a significant paradigm shift for our conventional army," he wrote in an e-mail to friends, after arriving at Forward Operating Base Shield, on the site of the former Olympic Training Center. "Throw into the mix the deadly I.E.D.'s that continue to produce casualties daily, rampant corruption and mixed allegiances, a Shia/Sunni divide that threatens all of our progress, coupled with a myriad of other elements, and it makes for the very complex battlespace which is Iraq today."

At the end of January, Rogers spent the better part of a Saturday night checking back in with home, by e-mail and using a "morale phone" that he shared with a couple of other soldiers. He had a two-week leave coming up, so that he could stand as the best man in his friend Shay Hill's wedding, in Jacksonville, and he called Hill, who was heading out to a rugby game and couldn't talk. He was able to reach another friend, Kelly O'Connor, an Army recruiter stationed in St. Augustine; they talked about the relevance of his pre-deployment training at Fort Riley, in Kansas (so far, so good), and about the upcoming bachelor party they were planning for Hill, in Orlando. Rogers had no siblings, and had lost both his parents to illness in 2000. He thought of Hill and O'Connor as surrogate brothers. By the time Hill returned Rogers's call, it was

ADRIAN TOMINE



"In the marketplace of ideas, we may not have the best ideas, but we have the best marketing."

four in the morning in Iraq, and he could tell that he had woken Rogers up, so he kept the conversation brief. The next night, while helping his fiancée, Theresa, sort through the effects of her grandmother, who had recently died, Hill got a call from one of his neighbors in Jacksonville, who said that there were two men in uniform standing outside his door.

Several hours after the inadvertent wakeup call, it turned out, Rogers was sitting in the right rear seat of an armored Humvee, in East Baghdad, on a routine morning patrol, as it passed a guardrail concealing an I.E.D. The force of the explosion blew straight through the vehicle, knocking an Iraqi interpreter, in the left seat, into the street. The interpreter and an American gunner who was standing beside Rogers in the Humvee were injured. Rogers died instantly. He was forty.

Deputy Secretary England attended a memorial service at the Pentagon, where Thomas Gandy, a director of counterintelligence and human intelligence, hailed Rogers as "simply the most talented officer I ever had the opportunity to serve with," and described his selflessness in taking wounded veterans at Walter Reed hospital to a Super Bowl party on a nearby base. "There was something special about Alan Rogers," Lieutenant General John F. Kimmons, the deputy chief of staff for Army Intelligence, said. "He was more than he seemed."

An obituary in the Gainesville *Sun* mentioned that Rogers was divorced and a Baptist minister—news, in both cases, to many of his friends at the Washington, D.C., chapter of American Veterans for Equal Rights (AVER), formerly known as Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Veterans of America. The minister claim was accurate—Rogers's troops on Team Stiletto called him the Preacher, on account of his frequent sermonlike pep talks—and before his burial at Arlington National Cemetery, in March, a "homegoing service" was held for his casket at the Ebenezer Baptist Church, in Starke, Florida, where he was ordained, in 1995. (Governor Charlie Crist ordered the flags at the statehouse flown at half-mast for the occasion.) The mention of a divorce was not accurate; it may have been a story some acquaintances passed on to explain why Rogers did not have a wife or a girlfriend. "We made a statement that he was married to the Army," one longtime friend told me.

Defense Department policy acts as a deep closet, even in death. From the Second World War until the Clinton Presidency, homosexuality in the armed services was banned outright; declaring oneself gay was a common draft-dodging maneuver during the Vietnam years. When Bill Clinton took office, in 1993, he vowed to end the ban, but, facing strong opposition from the four-star community, he settled on a compromise: "Don't ask, don't tell," which attempted to draw a distinction between homosexuality (not forbidden in theory) and homosexual conduct (grounds for immediate discharge). The effectiveness of the distinction has been a source of debate ever since.

Shortly after Rogers moved to Washington, in 2004, he joined AVER, and served as the local chapter's membership coördinator and treasurer, participating in "pride" festivals in Baltimore and Washington and organizing rafting and movie trips; among the latter was a trip to see "Gunner Palace," a documentary about the experiences of soldiers in Iraq. In March of 2005, an AVER member named Tom posted to the organization's Yahoo discussion group an *Army Times* op-ed titled "Gays in the Military: It's a Question of Liberty." "Thanks for sharing this," Rogers posted, in response. "It's nice to see active-duty field-grade officers making a strong case for the repeal of D.A.D.T. and publishing it in the *Army Times*. Curious to read some of the backlash the subsequent issues will no doubt contain." (A retired officer, Lieutenant Colonel James E. Schmidt, wrote, "The Bible clearly states that homosexuality is a sin. Leaders must have respect from those they lead. I do not think many soldiers will respect or follow a leader who promotes sin.") As word of Rogers's death spread in the gay community, some began to wonder if he might not qualify as the first known gay casualty of the Iraq war. Opponents of the military's policy, noting his impeccable résumé, and his work with the Deputy Secretary of Defense, saw in Rogers a transformative figure and began soliciting media coverage.

About a dozen gay active-duty personnel, including one senior officer, attended Rogers's formal burial at Arlington, and joined in a memorial celebration later that evening at a local bed-and-breakfast that was attended by reporters from the Washington *Post* and from N.P.R.'s "Morning Edition." The *Post's* unusually detailed obituary ran the following week, under the headline "ARMY OFFICER REMEMBERED AS HERO: FRIENDS, FELLOW SOLDIERS MOURN LOSS OF 'EXCEPTIONAL' MAN." It cited his Purple Heart and his two bronze stars, discussed the Persian rug that Rogers's team in Baghdad had pitched in to buy for Shay Hill as a wedding gift, and quoted Mark Nadel, Rogers's thesis adviser at Georgetown, saying that he recalled thinking, "This is a guy I'm going to hear from in ten years, and he's going to be a general." It did not mention that the subject of the thesis was the effect of "Don't ask, don't tell" on United States military recruiting and retention rates. The N.P.R. segment was pegged to news of the four-thousand-casualty mark having been crossed five years after the invasion, with Rogers's story standing in as a kind of Everyman soldier's. "You should know that about two hundred people came to the burial, soldiers and civilians alike," the host, Steve Inskeep, said. "Major Rogers had no wife or child to take away the flag that draped his coffin, so soldiers folded that flag and gave it to his cousin, Cathy Long."

The coverage pleased Long, who is fifty-nine, and who became close to Rogers after the death of both his parents, assuming an almost motherly role. Others, particularly those who had tipped off the *Post* and N.P.R., were frustrated by what was omitted. Weren't the skill and the secrecy with which Rogers had compartmentalized the varied and seemingly incompatible aspects of his accomplished life a notable part of his "exceptional" story? Outing him was left to the Washington *Blade*, a gay weekly, which ran the headline "MEDIA, MILITARY KEPT SOLDIER IN CLOSET AFTER DEATH: FRIENDS SAY GAY MAN KILLED IN IRAQ WOULD WANT THE TRUTH TO BE KNOWN." The blogger Andrew Sullivan linked to the *Blade* account and encouraged readers to complain to the *Post*. "I can see why outing someone who is alive and closeted is unethical," he wrote. "*Inning* someone who is dead and was out is a function of utterly misplaced sensitivity, rooted in well-intentioned but incontrovertible homophobia."

At the end of March, a patent agent in the Washington, D.C., area named Rob Pilaud decided to create a Wikipedia page for Rogers. Pilaud was a peripheral friend of Rogers—he wasn't aware of the death until he received an e-mail invitation to the bed-and-breakfast gathering, seven weeks afterward—but he felt connected to the cause through his father (a retired enlisted man) and his domestic partner (a former military interpreter).

Two days after the Wikipedia entry appeared, an anonymous editor removed nearly all the biographical information, including references to Rogers's involvement with AVER. The new entry read, simply, "Alan G. Rogers was a United States Army Major that died in Iraq in late January 2008. Alan was an ordained pastor." The anonymous editor also added a comment on the Wiki Talk page which suggested that he or she had an even more personal connection to the subject: "Alan's life was not about his sexual orientation but rather about the body of work he performed ministering to others and helping the defense of the country. Quit trying to press an agenda that Alan wouldn't have wanted made public just to suit your own ends."

Pilaud decided to track the tamperer's I.P. address, and what he found lent credence to a growing conspiracy theory among his friends. The address associated with the computer on which the edits were made was assigned to "Army Information Systems Command-Pentagon." A subsequent search appeared to connect the computer to the department run by Lieutenant General John F. Kimmons, the deputy chief of staff for Army Intelligence, who had not only praised Rogers at the Pentagon memorial service ("I rated Alan in the top five per cent of all M.I. majors I had seen in thirty-four years of service") but had also presented the American flag to Cathy Long at the burial. A brief Wiki edit war ensued. Pilaud expanded on his initial entry, referring to Rogers as a "civil rights activist." He uploaded a photograph of Rogers holding hands with another man on the beach at a same-sex wedding ceremony. He added that "the subsequent coverage of his death in the national media sparked a debate as to what information should and should not be included in the biography of a gay military person killed in action."

Pilaud told me a few weeks later, "There's this sort of dark side of me that thinks they shoved him off to Iraq to get rid of him." He wondered if a further military coverup might not be to blame for the fact that Georgetown had proved unable to furnish a copy of Rogers's master's thesis.

The coverup, such as it was, was not the result of any coördinated government campaign but a freelance effort enabled by the good intentions of colleagues and friends whose own experiences with

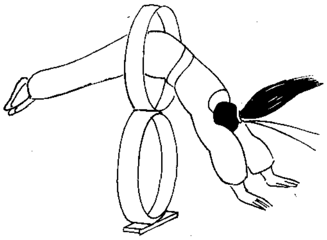
"*It's for you.*"

Rogers made it hard to conceive of him as a dissident of any kind. Lieutenant Colonel Mike Hardy worked in the cubicle across from Rogers at the Pentagon, and spoke movingly at the memorial service, comparing Rogers's mentoring of his troops to the sacrifices of the apostle Paul. He and Rogers were the only African-Americans in the office with Army backgrounds. "Alan was a few years behind me, but I would have rated him above me in leadership and intelligence," Hardy said recently. Hardy was assigned the role of casualty assistance officer, overseeing the execution of Rogers's will, and evidently took this to include the protection of Rogers's legacy from people who seemed too ready to introduce politics into the grieving process. After the bed-and-breakfast gathering, where he was struck by the composition of the mourners, Hardy sent an e-mail to Donna St. George, the *Post* reporter, expressing vague concern, on behalf of Rogers's family, about the tone of her forthcoming piece. Deborah Howell, the *Post's* ombudsman, did not mention Hardy or the letter in her follow-up account, "PUBLIC DEATH, PRIVATE LIFE," but she explained that the paper's decision not to disclose Rogers's sexuality had been an "agonizing" one, which was ultimately made by the paper's executive editor, Len Downie, who preferred to exercise caution in the absence of any proof of the soldier's own wishes. (Howell concluded that the paper had erred: "There was enough evidence—particularly of Rogers's feelings about 'Don't ask, don't tell'—to warrant quoting his friends and adding that dimension to the story of his life.")

"To a person—I really mean every person in the office was completely surprised," Hardy told me, referring to Rogers's private life. Hardy's officemates knew Rogers as an easygoing college-football enthusiast and a capable volleyball player—their team captain, last June, at the annual office picnic. "'The first openly gay soldier to die in Iraq,'" Hardy said, recalling Pilaud's Wikipedia entry. "We're, like, 'Hold it. If it's a surprise to all of us, that can't count as the first openly gay soldier to die in Iraq.' And we just felt there was an agenda that wasn't Alan's." Hardy said that he did not know who had made the Wikipedia edits, but he mentioned a recent article in *USA Today* in which a soldier's mother expressed some unease about the specificity of the instructions her son had given her in the event of his death—which friends should speak on his behalf, what songs to play at his funeral. "Nowhere—and I read the will—did Alan leave any piece of paper that said that," Hardy told me. "He did not make any moves to be remembered as a gay soldier. Nowhere in those phone calls home did he say, 'Let everyone know that I died a proud gay officer.'" Of course, being a proud gay officer is tantamount, under the current military policy, to being a retired gay officer with no pension.

Hardy's appeal to the wishes and concerns of the family may have been weakened by the fact that the closest living relatives of the deceased were only cousins, but he found additional moral support from Rogers's longtime friend Shay Hill, whom Rogers had designated his executor and sole benefactor. Hill lodged a complaint with the Washington *Blade* arguing that Rogers's sexuality had "no more relevance than the color of his skin," and, after joking with Hardy about the biographical editing, even considered pursuing defamation charges against Wikipedia on behalf of the Rogers estate. "It's really minimizing him," Hill told me. "Granted, we remember the bad and the good, but typically we remember the good. I'm not saying being gay is bad or good, just saying he would rather be remembered for a lot more than that."

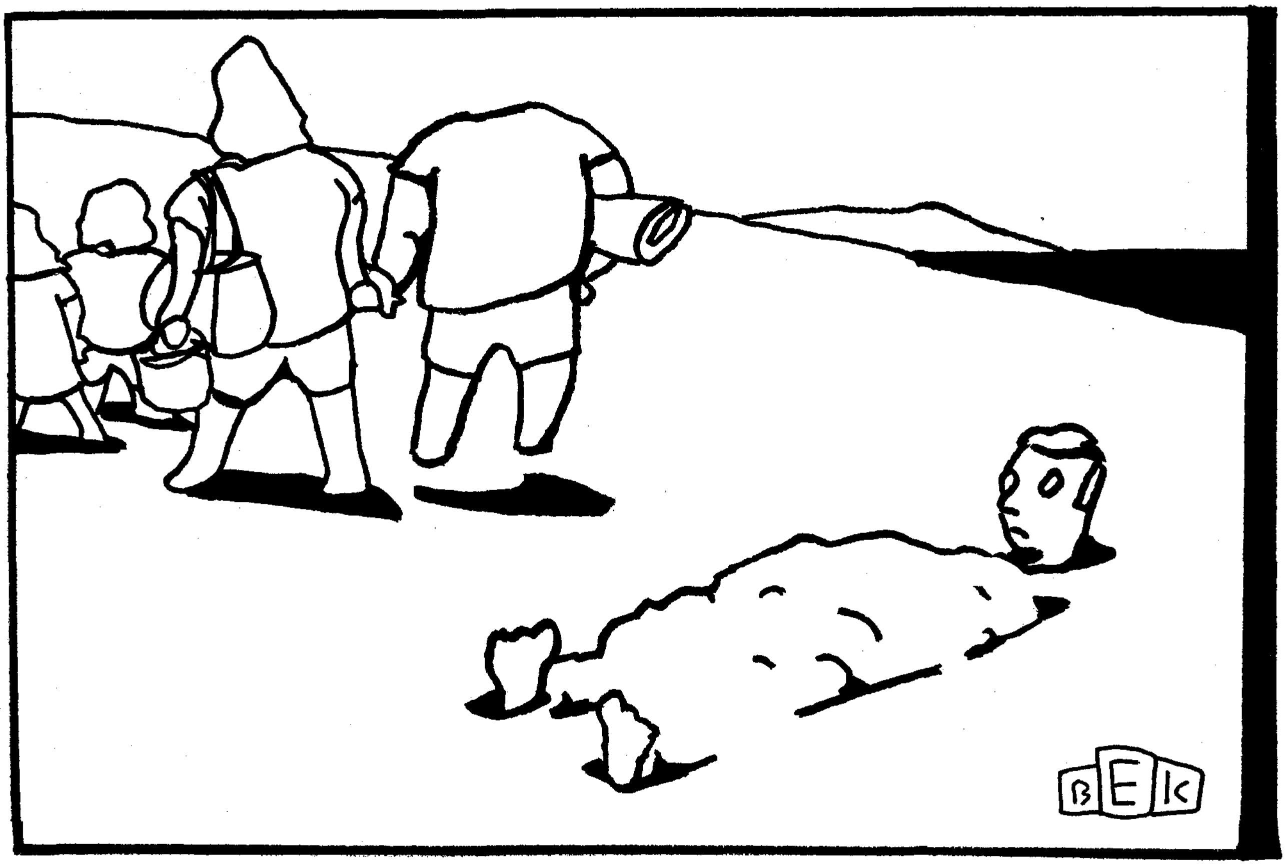
After Rogers's death, it emerged that there were a number of people who considered him to be their closest friend, and who felt that they were in a position to discern how he would have wished to be remembered. Their differing notions may have said more about the richness of Rogers's friendships than about his beliefs. Nearly everyone, in recalling Rogers, talked about his great strength as a listener—his habit of drawing people out and making them feel as though their best selves had been understood. Only in retrospect did they realize that he never revealed much of himself.



The wrangling over Rogers's private life threatened to obscure a remarkable American biography. He was born in New York City in 1967; the man his mother had married was in prison and denied paternity, so she, a Roman Catholic of Trinidadian descent, put him up for adoption. He lived at the Foundling Hospital, an orphanage on Sixth Avenue, until he was three, when he moved into the Mitchel Houses, in the South Bronx, with his new parents, George and Genevieve Rogers. George worked in a garment factory; Genevieve stayed home to take care of Alan, who was never told that he was adopted. When Alan was in the fourth grade, he and his mother moved to Hampton, Florida, an hour southwest of Jacksonville, to take care of Genevieve's mother, who was ailing. (George continued working at the factory, and joined them after he retired.) Hampton has a population of about four hundred, and the new living circumstances could hardly have been more different from the South Bronx.

The Rogerses were devout Southern Baptists, and in Hampton Alan mostly kept to himself and his Bible, occasionally picking buckets of pecans from a giant tree in the back yard. He was the only boy to carry a briefcase to school in the eighth grade, and in high school he joined the debate team. In every picture from his school days, his shirts appear pressed and tucked. "He reminded me of Urkel growing up—you know, the nerdy Urkel," Gordon Smith, a former classmate, who is now the police chief in the neighboring town of Starke, said recently. "But he got along with everybody. Nothing bothered him. He just read his Bible. He was one of those few people you meet in life where nobody has nothing bad to say. It was just hard for me to picture him going into the military. I'll be honest with you: I'd have never dreamed it in my life that he'd be a military man. I believed he'd be a preacher. 'Cause he never was a tough, macho kind of guy."

At the time of Rogers's enlistment, in 1987, he had never been to the Atlantic Ocean, despite the fact that he lived



no farther than seventy miles from the coast. It is not difficult to imagine that, amid such a sheltered environment, and given his family's limited financial means, the Army seemed an easy way out—all the more so when he was assigned to Giebelstadt Army Airfield, in Germany. While in Germany, friends recalled, Rogers struggled to reconcile his emerging sexuality with his faith, and found sanctuary in a house owned by an American pharmaceutical executive named Marty McNeil, who was married (his wife worked for *Stars and Stripes*) and also had a male lover. McNeil's house was a popular retreat for gay service members in Germany at the time, but McNeil was also a practicing Roman Catholic, and he often spoke with Rogers about his admiration of the Jesuits. Rogers joined the Giebelstadt Gospel Church and became an associate pastor. "Alan really cared deeply about what people felt about him—people's respect for him," McNeil told me. "He went to a lot of effort to maintain that respect. He certainly impressed the hell out of my father, an ex-marine." McNeil said that he and his father had "one of those 'Don't ask, don't tell' relationships," but that his father continued to ask about Rogers ten years after Rogers had left the country.

Broadly speaking, Rogers's friends could be divided into two camps, one associated with Florida and the other with Washington. "Shay was never really a part of Alan's gay life," Tami Sadowski, a close friend from Washington, said in April, at a gathering at her house, where several people expressed reservations about Hill's handling of the estate, and shared recollections of Rogers as a lover of good food and fashion, who enjoyed taking long vacations in the Greek Isles. In 2004, Sadowski attended an Army ball as Rogers's date, and last year she asked Rogers to stand beside her as a "man of honor" at her marriage to Matt Wagenhofer. "I think we were all a little surprised to find out that Shay was the sole beneficiary of the will," she said, and added that she had started an Alan G. Rogers Memorial Scholarship Fund, to which Hill had not yet contributed anything. As Rogers's beneficiary, Hill was entitled to the military life-insurance policy of four hundred thousand dollars.

Hill, an affable environmental scientist with a slight drawl and a ruddy complexion, met Rogers in 1992, while selling boiled peanuts at the side of the road outside Gainesville to pay for his education at a local community college. Rogers, who had recently returned from Germany and had enrolled at the University of Florida, didn't particularly like boiled peanuts, but he decided to stop one day after noticing that Hill seemed always to be waving at him when he drove by. The waves were nothing more than a simple salesman's trick. "I almost didn't have the heart to say, 'I'm actually waving to everybody,'" Hill told me. But Rogers took the opportunity to invite Hill to a party, and Hill, in turn, invited Rogers to join in his regular games of Risk. Before long, they became roommates—Rogers had told Hill that he was gay—in what Hill calls the "international house of people," which included "a guy from Mexico, a black lady from England, and a white guy from South Africa."

Hill met his future wife, Theresa Bennett, at the Riverside Avenue Christian Church, in Jacksonville, in 2005. She was a commercial banker and came from a prominent Florida family—her grandfather Charles Bennett was the longest-serving congressman in the state's history, and the man responsible for placing the phrase "In God We Trust" on the nation's currency. She objected to homosexuality on religious grounds and likened it to drug addiction, so Hill spoke cautiously about Rogers before introducing her to him. He took her to Washington for Rogers's graduation from Georgetown, in 2005, and they arranged to stay at his town house. "There was an ironing board, there was a whole vase of fresh flowers near my bed, all clean linens, everything organized in the bathroom," she recalled. "You could eat off the floor." The discovery was unsettling at first—"I'm, like, 'Shay has an African-American gay best friend. This is *interesting*' "—but she came to regard Rogers as her favorite of Shay's friends, and the most respectful and supportive of their relationship. This may have been Rogers's singular gift: an extraordinary ability to read the anxieties of others, and to offer a suitable version of himself to fit the situation. "He realized that you don't change the system by alienating those who are against you," Shay told me. "You change the system by trying to convince those who are against you."

When I first met the Hills, a couple of months had passed since their wedding, and their house was overrun with boxes containing the personal effects of Major Alan G. Rogers, which had recently been delivered by the Army, as well as dozens of testimonials and condolences from dignitaries and acquaintances as varied as Senator Sam Brownback, of Kansas, and "Steve," of Team Stiletto. ("Sir . . . would be honored if you would accept this Babylonian Lion. He wanted to do one last thing for the man he called his friend, Alan.") Hill had been looking forward to the shipment as an opportunity to peer into the soul of a close but intensely private friend. "Think about if you died tomorrow," he said. "What would somebody remember you by? That, to me, is the neatest thing about receiving all these items."

Rogers did not appear to have kept a regular diary, however, and the writings that Hill had unearthed were for the most part spiritually reflective, not personally introspective. ("Rev. Rogers's life philosophy is summed up in these two sentences: 'If you meet me and forget me, you have lost NOTHING. When you meet Jesus and forget Him, you have lost EVERYTHING!' ") Rogers's collection of books was extensive, but notable more for its breadth (from the complete "Left Behind" series to Samantha Power's "A Problem from Hell") than for its exploration of any particular themes or ideas. A bright-orange life preserver served as a reminder that Rogers, for all his travels, had never learned to swim.

Hill pointed to a bongo drum—a gift from the men of the Bravo Company human-intelligence unit out of Yongsan, South Korea. "Here's something cool," he said. The skin of the drum had been marked up to resemble an interrogation form, and its joking tone suggested that some of Rogers's troops would have been neither shocked nor offended by Pilaud's Wikipedia entry: "Alan Rogers, a.k.a. Preacherman, Captain Velveeta . . . Source is very cocky and sure to talk about his knowledge of men's fashion. Do not talk about the inappropriateness of his tuxedo." A list of the subject's "documents" included "one book, titled 'Searching for My Perfect Bride,' unsuccessfully well used . . . one V.I.P. membership to all the clubs on Texas Street . . . one copy, 'It's Raining Men' CD."

Hill referred to his inheritance as "blood

ANCIENT ANECDOTAGE

As a former
and future
child, his ancient
anecdotage
was still in
pretty good
shape. But
Poor Richard,
his almanac of
day to day
had gone away,
and had become
instead a steady
palaver of what
where when and
why as he tried
with disturbing
perseveration
and failure to
tell us the date,
read the clock
and clean his
plate while regaling
us with enthralling
details of the day
he completed
the composition of
his first symphony
and of the time he
jumped naked into
the Orinoco, drunk
on jungle hooch,
and almost lost
his manhood
to the piranhas.

—*Kathryn Starbuck*

money," and after a few days of living with Rogers's effects he seemed to regard each unopened box as a kind of rebuke—a reminder of guilt. "The biggest burden has been not to wither his worldly goods away—to do something with them, aside from taking care of myself or my family," he said. "It's a higher responsibility." It was also slow going. He had had to get up early on the morning after learning of Rogers's death, and drive to Tallahassee to dig wells at the site of a proposed gas station. The wedding followed not long afterward, and then came an abbreviated honeymoon in Napa Valley. These were not ideal circumstances for grieving, or the most salutary conditions for beginning a happy marriage. Hill still had a dime that he found on the street during his bachelor party, in February; it had oxidized in such a way that President Roosevelt's face appeared black. It was dated 1967, the year of Rogers's birth, and Hill had noticed, while looking up at the stars that night, that Mars—the Roman god of war—was shining directly overhead. Hill's first fiduciary act as the executor of the Rogers estate was to sign for his dead best friend's credit-card bill when checking out of the rooms that Rogers had reserved for the occasion.

"You wonder, like, why he picked me," Hill said at one point. "I wonder that sometimes. A *lot* of people were his friends." He recounted the story of the deaths of Rogers's parents, which occurred in swift succession in 2000, when Rogers was stationed in Korea. George Rogers had had a heart attack while driving to visit Genevieve, who was suffering from kidney failure. She died less than two weeks later. In the interim period, Rogers was going through some family paperwork, and discovered that he'd been adopted. "She wasn't feeling well enough for him to approach her," Hill said. "So here he is, a grown man, had just buried his father, and he found out he was adopted. And I'm there as a friend to experience that. I don't know how I would have reacted if it were me. But then he did the eulogy at his mom's funeral. It was just amazing how he had the wherewithal."

Kelly O'Connor, the Army recruiter from St. Augustine, first met Rogers at a Kmart in Arizona, where O'Connor was working part time to pay for community college. One day, while stocking shelves, he noticed a customer wearing a Florida Gators T-shirt, and made a taunting comment; the Florida-Florida State football game was coming up, and O'Connor was a Seminoles fan. Rogers was the Gators partisan, and he invited O'Connor to a party to watch the game. The two men later ended up serving overlapping combat tours—O'Connor was a construction engineer who helped build base camps—at the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Upon returning to the United States, O'Connor volunteered for recruiting duty. "Anybody who was interested in military intelligence, I used to be able to call Alan," he told me. "It was just another of the things he did—he could talk to applicants about all the different careers that Intel had. He would make time in his schedule to call them back." O'Connor now runs the recruiting station in St. Augustine, and he was, like many of Rogers's friends, curious about Rogers's thesis.

The thesis did not turn up among Rogers's personal effects, although Theresa Hill showed me a white binder on the kitchen floor, labelled "Capstone Project Research," that left little doubt about the strength of Rogers's convictions on the matter. The binder included a printout of an e-mail from Rogers to his friend Jason Cianciotto (an AVER member at whose same-sex wedding Rogers had offered a prayer), explaining that his adviser was urging him to work on concealing his biases, and to focus more on analysis than on advocacy. (The adviser, Mark Nadel, explained that because the project was a capstone paper and not, technically, a thesis, there was no protocol for keeping a copy on file.) The research followed the history of attitudes toward gay servicemen in the military both before and since the introduction of the current policy, and included the story of Private First Class Barry Winchell, who was beaten to death in 1999 by a fellow-soldier at Fort Campbell, in Kentucky, because of suspicions that he was gay. Survey results have shown a steady increase in tolerance over time, with generals typically lagging behind enlisted men. A Zogby poll, in 2006, of people who had served in Iraq and Afghanistan showed that nearly half believed at least one member in their own unit to be gay, and, among those who felt certain that they had served alongside a gay colleague, about two-thirds did not think troop morale had been affected. Two weeks ago, the Washington *Post* released the results of a poll indicating that seventy-five per cent of Americans now favor repealing "Don't ask, don't tell," up from forty-four per cent fifteen years ago. Fifty per cent of veterans agreed.

While working in biometrics, after completing the thesis, Rogers had his first extended exposure to civilian contractors, and realized that not only did they make twice as much money for doing similar work, in many cases, as that of active-duty officers; they had their private lives to themselves. Shortly after accepting his third tour of duty in Iraq, last year, Rogers began telling friends that he planned

"Every new car comes with your own back-yard drilling rights."

"And, ultimately, I want to direct."

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to retire from the Army when he reached the twenty-year mark, which would have coincided with his stateside return. He was beginning to worry that he would never get a chance to settle down and enjoy a long-term relationship. One of the people he called on the night before his death was his friend Tami Sadowski, who works as a real-estate broker in Maryland. They had made arrangements to go house hunting in the D.C. area during his two-week leave.

"He followed every rule he believed in," a close friend and colleague who got to know Rogers well while they were both living in Atlanta, near the headquarters of the Third U.S. Army, in 2003, told me. "He believed in the Army. It was so important to him. This is probably the perfect case study of somebody who was gay and accepted the Army's values—and how it doesn't work at the end of the day. If he hadn't died in Iraq, the Army would have lost him."

A couple of weeks after Memorial Day, Hampton held a political rally at its City Park, a sandy square a few hundred yards from the one-story house where Rogers and his parents had lived. Hampton's mayor, Jim Mitzel, refers to the town as "Mayberry, U.S.A." The rally featured short speeches by candidates running for the local school board, county commissioner, sheriff, and even for Congress, and was intended to raise money for a Hampton Veterans Memorial, which would be dedicated in the honor of Major Rogers, Hampton's first and only casualty of the War on Terror. Rude Roy the BBQ Boy, a burly Vietnam veteran with a gray ponytail, was selling pulled-pork sandwiches and burgers, and donating twenty per cent of his proceeds to the effort; and the Mayor's wife, Jennifer, occasionally passed around a jar and minded a folding table at which contributors could inspect potential designs for the memorial statue. (Five thousand dollars would buy a helmet sitting atop a standing machine gun, and twice that much added a pair of boots.) On a pole to the right of the town bandstand, Mayor Mitzel had affixed a poster board mounted with a couple of local newspaper stories about Rogers. "SOLDIER: TOOK CARE OF HIS AGING PARENTS AS THEY GREW WEAK" read one headline, above an article that repeated the divorce canard.

Gordon Smith, the Starke police chief and Rogers's old classmate, was there, running for the office of sheriff, with a large contingent of supporters giving out free ice cream. ("There's nobody more red, white, and blue than Gordon Smith," he said. "Nobody loves the Lord above more than I do.") During pauses between speeches, a man wearing an American-flag bandanna sang karaoke to the music of Eric Clapton and Creed. The other candidates included a member of the National Guard who had been called to drill duty, and who therefore asked the Hampton police chief to read a statement on his behalf, and a man, Charles Van Zant, who said that his call to public service had come last year when his son, a member of the local school board, began his second Iraq deployment, and Governor Crist asked Dad to fill in. Van Zant, who was running for the State House, said that he had sought higher counsel in devising his platform. "I asked the Lord, 'Is there something else that you'd like for me to do?'" Van Zant said. "And he showed me two things. One, he showed me plainly that he wanted me to get in the fight against abortion politically. . . . Secondly, we've got an amendment coming up on our constitution that you need to vote yes for. It's amendment No. 2. It has to do with the definition of marriage as one man, one woman." Except for this digression, the day's honoree might have felt entirely at home.

Shay Hill and his wife spent the morning holding a yard sale to unload some of Rogers's less personal belongings—furniture, clothes, books—and they arrived late. After two weekends, they'd sold five hundred and forty-four dollars' worth, or just enough to clear a path through the living room. Instead of donating to Tami Sadowski's scholarship fund in Washington, they planned to give the cash to an organization in Jacksonville called Community Connections, for homeless women and children. Hill's pickup truck was loaded with paintings and some other selected items of Rogers's—a family Bible, a Buffalo Soldier figurine—that he intended to give to Cathy Long and her husband, Jerry.

The Longs, the only black people in the park, were easily recognizable as representatives of the Rogers family. Cathy is the grand-niece of George Rogers, Alan's adoptive father. She and Jerry were living in the Bronx, where Jerry worked as a New York City cop, when Alan was adopted. They had a son who was about the same age, and had joined George and Genevieve and Alan for their first Thanksgiving dinner. In 1990, the Longs moved to Ocala, about an hour south of Hampton, which is where I'd first met them, a few weeks before the rally.

Cathy works the night shift at a hospital, as a nurse, so she had suggested that we have an early dinner, at four o'clock, in a Piccadilly Cafeteria on State Road 40. She and Jerry seemed to be on familiar terms with much of the staff and the clientele. Hill had warned me that the Longs didn't approve of homosexuality, and Cathy seemed uncomfortable talking about it. "As far as the family is concerned, we really did not become privy, I guess you could say, to 'the information' until Alan had passed," she said. "Just because he felt that all people should be treated the same—and I'm sure that that was the extent of his involvement, not that he was trying to parade any particular life style, or whatever. He just loved people. He was a people person."

Jerry, a Vietnam veteran, said grace before we ate. Cathy mentioned the phone call she'd received from Rogers the day before his death; they were in Georgia at the time, looking at investment properties, and Rogers was worried about the possibility of their leaving Ocala, which he'd come to see as an extension of his home base. In retrospect, Cathy felt that the way he'd said "I love you," at the close of the conversation, seemed like a final goodbye. She hadn't yet been able to delete his number from her phone, and she said that, in the days after the guardrail explosion, she'd received more than fifty calls from servicemen and women, many of them in Iraq. "One of the generals, I had to console *him*," she said. "He tried to express his condolences, but I was concerned with what was going on with him, because he was still there." She and Jerry couldn't agree on whether their Verizon bill for that month had exceeded three hundred or eight hundred dollars.

They recalled the last time they'd seen Rogers, about a year ago, and how eager he had been to take them to the Jacksonville Landing, a waterfront tourist plaza with restaurants and shops. When they arrived, the Landing was closed, because of a terrorist threat, so they met at a Japanese restaurant instead, and Shay Hill showed up carrying a five-foot python in a pillowcase—Rogers's pet, as it turned out, which had been left in Hill's care. "I joked with Alan for the longest time," Cathy told me. "I said, 'You know, Alan, I finally saw a side of you that I didn't know was there.' I never took him to be a snake owner." The python's name is Alexis, and it currently lives in a tank in the Hills' bedroom.

In late June, Shay Hill received a CD from the Army, the contents of which drastically altered his perspective on the preceding five months. It contained the unclassified files from Rogers's laptop in Iraq, among them a "letter of intent," to accompany his will.

Rogers had told Hill that the letter of intent would be included in a box of clothes for the wedding that he was shipping to Jacksonville before departing for Iraq. He'd mentioned it primarily to suggest that Hill not open the box when it arrived. Hill recalled this exchange on the night that the two Army representatives came to his door with the news of Rogers's death. He told Kelly O'Connor, who had raced over from St. Augustine, and they opened the box together. But there was no letter. Evidently, Rogers did not finish writing it until he had arrived in Baghdad, in December.

"Well, if you're reading this, you've got a lot of work to do," Rogers wrote, and then explained in some detail the various ways in which he had clearly considered the question of his legacy. He wished his funds to be disbursed not only to other friends and family but to a variety of organizations: the N.A.A.C.P., AVER, and the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, which publishes a gay soldier's survival guide. The letter also mentioned a godson, living in California, for whom Rogers wanted to set up a trust; Hill hadn't known of any godchildren, and he didn't recognize the names of the child's parents. "I'm not even sure if they know Alan is dead," he said, marvelling at the number of secrets his friend had kept.

Hill realized that none of the people mentioned in the letter knew of its existence, and that, legally speaking, he was still the sole beneficiary. Who was to say that Rogers hadn't intended to revise the letter further? He hadn't printed it and signed it, after all. Shay and Theresa had recently made an offer on a new home, and they'd been planning to use much of the life-insurance money for the down payment. "I did make some purchases I wouldn't have made," Shay said, with a mixture of remorse and aggravation. "This has completely thrown our lives into a whirlwind. My house has been saturated with physical *stuff*."

But his conscience soon overpowered his frustration, and after consulting a minister he even began to relieve himself of the guilt associated with all the remaining household clutter. "Little did I know that he wasn't blessing me as much as I thought he was," Hill said. "I mean, I was blessed to be his best friend. Maybe that's the whole life lesson."

He read aloud some more from Rogers's letter: "Growing up in New York, and then moving to the small town of Hampton, I never imagined that I would see much beyond the city limits of Bradford County. My parents gave me so much love and hope that there was a better life out there, and by God's grace I found it. The U.S. Army has provided me such a wonderful opportunity to realize my dreams to go to college and see parts of the world that I had only read about in schoolbooks. I've been to countries that many only dream about. Walked the streets of Europe: Paris, Greece, Spain, Germany, England, Italy, Czech Republic. I've seen Asia, South America, and, of course, the Middle East. . . . As you know I've been raised in the Church and have always had a love, reverence, and fascination for God. I am blessed to be saved by His grace, and so I know that I am going up yonder to be with my Lord. Please tell those who remain not to grieve too much but to have a big party and celebrate. . . . My only regret is that I have never found that special one to grow old with and watch the sunset with." ♦

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Ben McGrath answers readers' questions.

PROFILES

THE OLYMPIAN

How China's greatest musician will win the Beijing Games.

BY DAVID REMNICK

Few citizens of the People's Republic stand to benefit more from this summer's Olympic Games, in Beijing, than a young man from the Manchurian city of Shenyang named Lang Lang. The son of a vice cop and a telephone operator, Lang Lang is no athlete—he is as sedentary as a veal calf in a dark shed—but he has prepared for the Games with the intensity of a middle-distance runner and the ecstatic anticipation of a groom. Unless Yao Ming, of the Houston Rockets, leads the Chinese past Kobe Bryant and the Americans to a gold medal, it is Lang Lang, a gifted pianist prone to red silk tuxedos and Lisztian histrionics at the keyboard, who is likeliest to emerge as the Chinese performer most enriched by the Olympics.

Lang Lang, whose everyday outfit is a black T-shirt, a silvery Versace jacket, jeans, and sneakers of his own design, will be a ubiquitous Olympic presence. He has already performed in Tiananmen Square to celebrate the one-year countdown to the Beijing Games, and the talk around the capital is that he will be a focal point of the opening ceremonies. (The program is a closely held secret. But, if Lang does play, one can assume that his costume will tend toward the Elton John circa "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road" end of the sartorial spectrum.) He will attend several high-profile events in the role of international celebrity, and, because he is both engaging and a fluent English speaker, he'll be put to work by the "Today" show. Bookstores will feature his new, as-told-to autobiography, "Journey of a Thousand Miles," and record stores will display his recordings of Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, and Chopin, along with his best-selling album, "Dragon Songs," a compilation of new and traditional Chinese music. Theatres will soon screen "Lang Lang's Song for 2008," an adoring documentary about his life. Perhaps the swiftest way to encapsulate his Olympian presence is to point out that one of the official pandas of the Beijing Games has been named after him.

Lang Lang and his management team, which is based in New York, have been anticipating this moment for at least three years. In the realm of high culture, Lang is China's first crossover star, and the commercial world, foreign and domestic, has responded. He already has endorsement deals with Audi, Montblanc, Sony Electronics, Adidas, and Steinway, and in August he will be seen advertising their wares, on television and on billboards. His musical paean to the virtues of China Merchants Bank is already a staple of CCTV, and, in Shanghai, his face is on the side of hundreds of buses, a smiling endorsement of a mineral water from Tibet. Not long before I met Lang, in June in Beijing, he had been in the States recording a commercial for United Airlines—playing "Rhapsody in Blue" with Herbie Hancock.

"The Olympics are going to raise the profile, there's no doubt," Lang Lang said one day as he was riding to a book signing in downtown Beijing. "Pop stars aren't taking advantage. They aren't famous outside of China."

At twenty-six, Lang Lang is no longer a prodigy. He is a serious and hardworking pianist who has been selling out Carnegie Hall and other major venues for five years. He is charming and unpretentious, though he has a penchant for moony gyrations and emotive expressions that tend to appall his critics. He is perhaps the showiest performer since Vladimir de Pachmann, a Chopin specialist of a century ago who used to milk cows to exercise his fingers and dip each digit in a glass of brandy before recitals. Lang's irreverence is unabashed. One of the most popular clips

Lang is a superb, evolving musician, who e

e fees because of his novelty and his flair—and because he is an avatar of the Chinese ascendance. Photograph by Platon.

of Lang Lang on YouTube shows him playing Chopin's "Black Key" étude, Opus 10, No. 5, with an orange. Lang wears so much product in his hair that when he sways in rapture to his playing his head looks like a porcupine in a typhoon. As a homegrown cultural star, he has the support of a government that is eager to be seen as something more than the world's most enormous market and workplace. "A country like China, which has developed so quickly economically, has to pay attention that it also becomes a civilized country, not just a gigantic national business," the conductor Long Yu told me.

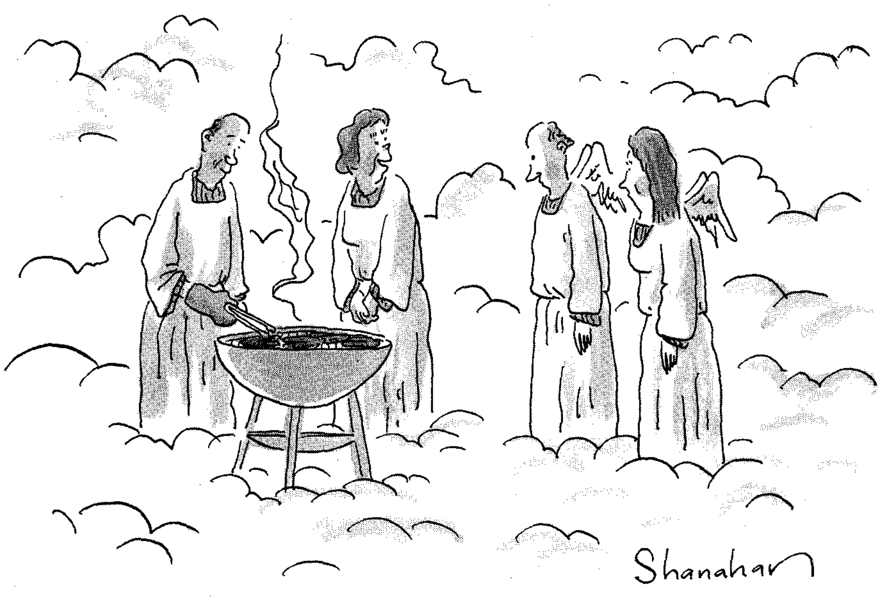
As China's first for-export pianist, Lang Lang enjoys certain advantages. Just as the revolutionary director Sergei Eisenstein was able to call on the Soviet masses to people the crowd scenes of "Battleship Potemkin," the producers of Lang's mythopoetic bio-pic were able to call on workers paid a pittance to drag his grand piano to the ends and heights of the world. "Only in China," as Lang said. In "Lang Lang's Song," you see him play a Steinway on the rocks near the Hukou Cascade, at an unlikely spot on the Great Wall, on an elevated platform overlooking the Huangpu River in Shanghai. J. Lo does not enjoy the same right-of-way in the Bronx that Lang does in China. The city of Beijing granted Lang access to the Temple of Heaven for half a day so that he could play Beethoven's "Emperor" Concerto in solitude at the temple's Yuanqiu altar, where the Chinese emperors once communed with the gods. "I love this shot!" Lang whispered to me one day at the film's première in Beijing, as the waters of the Yellow River undulated in the belly curves of his piano.

Lang Lang is a superb, evolving musician, but he does not earn the money he does because he is better than, say, Maurizio Pollini, Martha Argerich, or, in truth, a dozen others. He earns it because of his shiny novelty and flair, and, perhaps especially, because he is an avatar of the Chinese ascendance. His rewards, by classical standards, are impressive. In the past several years, Lang has averaged a hundred and twenty-five concerts a year, and he usually gets fifty thousand dollars for a recital. His fee for a private corporate concert can be five times that, or more. "If you do five of those in a year, you've made enough to live on," he said. His records sell up to two hundred thousand copies—"peanuts for a pop star, but good for classical." The Olympics, he said, "can't hurt with fees, and my negotiating power to promote classical music will get better, too." His entrepreneurial role model, he said, is Tiger Woods. Lang's commercial potential, especially in China, is such that his lawyers are trademarking his name—it appears on programs as "Lang Lang™." His signature, which he fashions into the curvy shape of a piano, is also protected by Chinese law. "Lang Lang is a good name," he said, "but it's also a real name."

Thirty-five years ago, in the wake of Ping-Pong diplomacy and Henry Kissinger's secret visit to Beijing, the Philadelphia Orchestra, under the direction of Eugene Ormandy, was invited to perform in Beijing and Shanghai—a landmark moment in Chinese cultural history. This June, the orchestra, under the direction of the German-born conductor Christoph Eschenbach, returned to China to commemorate the breakthrough, and Lang Lang signed on to be the soloist for the Grieg Piano Concerto and "The Yellow River Piano Concerto," a staple performance piece of the Cultural Revolution.

"That event was just as complicated and important as the New York Philharmonic going to Pyongyang this year," Lang Lang said as we headed toward a rehearsal with the Philadelphians in Beijing. "When the Philadelphia Orchestra came here to Beijing thirty-five years ago, the Cultural Revolution was still going on, but Eugene Ormandy came anyway. It was a huge experience for us Chinese. My parents had all sorts of relatives affected deeply by the Cultural Revolution, and they were affected, too. The Philadelphia Orchestra concert in 1973 was the first cultural manifestation of the West."

At the start of the Cultural Revolution, in 1966, Mao Zedong banned nearly all Western classical music as a feudal vestige of bourgeois society. Composers, conductors, musicians, and teachers were commonly branded "counter-revolutionaries" and sent to reëducation camps. Some were imprisoned or tortured, others beaten and made to recant. At least seventeen conservatory professors, their family members, and students committed suicide. Along with hundreds of others in the cultural élite, Ma Sicong, the head of the Central Conservatory, was locked in the grounds of the Communist Party School in Beijing, where he was made to read Mao's works, clean toilets, haul rocks, and compose odes of self-rebuke. Because his name means "horse," Ma was forced to eat grass; the Red Guards also beat him in the head with a plank



"The wings are addictive."

studded with nails. Twice each day, the prisoners were forced to sing "The Howling Song":

I am an ox-ghost and snake demon.
I am guilty, I am guilty.
I committed crimes against the people....
If I speak or act without permission,
May you beat me and smash me.
Beat me and smash me.

A central figure in the Cultural Revolution was Jiang Qing, Madame Mao, who became a kind of empress of the arts, suppressing Tchaikovsky, Debussy, and Schoenberg and other traces of foreign influence, and ordering the creation of new, proletarian versions of traditional operas and musical compositions. "Today, even in Afghanistan and Iraq and Iran, you can watch television and learn at least something about what is going on in the country," Long Yu said. "In those days, in China, no one had any idea at all."

"If you're my wife, I'm not here."

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Although the Cultural Revolution was not yet spent when Richard Nixon came to China, in 1972, the diplomatic initiative was the regime's priority, and Mao's premier, Zhou Enlai, made it possible for the Philadelphia Orchestra to come the following year. Madame Mao was pleased that Ormandy had added to the program "The Yellow River Concerto," a piece composed at her command by a committee of Party-approved musicians. The concerto, according to one member of the committee, the pianist Yin Chengzong, was meant to reflect "Chairman Mao's concept of people's war," and incorporates the melody from "The East Is Red" and the Communist anthem, the "Internationale." The *Times* critic Harold Schonberg, who went to China with the Philadelphia Orchestra, called it "movie music . . . a rehash of Rachmaninoff, Khachaturian, late romanticism, bastardized Chinese music and Warner Brothers climaxes"; members of the Philadelphia Orchestra referred to it as "The Yellow Fever Concerto." Madame Mao also said that she would permit the orchestra to play Beethoven, but only up to a point. Nicholas Platt, an American diplomat who acted as a liaison between the Chinese government and the orchestra, learned that she insisted on Beethoven's Sixth Symphony, the "Pastoral," but Ormandy, upon landing in Shanghai, told Platt that he would play the Third, the Fifth, the Seventh—but not the Sixth. Caught between a maniacal host and an imperious maestro, Platt extended the art of negotiating to the breaking point: "I told Ormandy, 'This government came to power with a peasant revolution. This is Beethoven's pastoral symphony. Peasants love the pastoral, they love nature. They love program music. This is Beethoven's one piece of program music.' I said, 'The fourth movement has a storm in it and the fifth movement is peaceful and this Communist Party leadership is peaceful.' Now, I was totally making it up. Finally, Ormandy said, 'O.K., we're in Rome, I'll do as the Romans do.'"

Even though the Philadelphians had not brought the music for the Sixth, the Chinese managed to get parts from the Central Philharmonic orchestra. But there was a last hurdle. "Ormandy had told us that he didn't like Chinese food," Platt said. "He wanted his wife, Gretel, to cook chicken breasts and steaks for him in their room. I said, 'I understand you don't like Chinese food, but here in China all social life revolves around the table. You don't have to really eat anything, but you do have to show up.' Well, he showed up the first night and he *loved* the food."

Lang Lang arrived at the Cultural Palace of Nationalities, the same small, now dingy hall where Ormandy conducted in 1973. Onstage, Eschenbach, a rail-straight figure with a gleaming pate, was finishing a run-through of Beethoven's "Egmont" Overture. When he spotted Lang, Eschenbach broke into a grin. The two have known each other since Lang was a teen-ager studying at the Curtis Institute of Music, in Philadelphia. Lang climbed onstage and embraced the conductor.

A piano was wheeled to center stage, and Lang rehearsed "The Yellow River Concerto," which he plays constantly at the request of Chinese audiences, and the Grieg Piano Concerto, a warhorse of a different breed. During the rehearsal, Lang was all business, and by the time he was done his shirt and jacket were soaked with sweat. Throughout, he kept scanning the nearly empty hall, trying to spot his father, Lang Guoren. But his father, who was sitting next to me, had relaxed his constant vigil and had fallen asleep. Lang pursed his lips and frowned with frustration. He and his father have been loving, often tense companions since his prodigy days. His mother was also travelling with him, as she has done since he turned professional, as a teen-ager, but she is milder, sweet, open.

"I wanted to get a sense from my father how the hall sounded," Lang told me later. "To me, it sounded a little dry. There's no sustain in the sound, no *oooom*—no intensity yet. I wanted to hear from my father whether I was being overwhelmed by the orchestra or maybe even vice versa." Awakened from his nap at last, Lang Guoren moved around the hall snapping photographs of everyone; his digital record of Lang's career must be in the millions.

That night, Lang Lang, his parents, a few guests, and Eschenbach took a room at the Palm Springs club, tucked away in a posh apartment building, for dinner. Lang has the same problem eating in Beijing restaurants that Madonna does in New York, and he avoids it. While we ate and Lang and Eschenbach gossiped a little about the classical-music world, a large television tuned to CCTV murmured on the wall. There was only one subject: for weeks, the airwaves had been showing almost nothing other than news of the May 12th earthquake in Sichuan province, in which nearly seventy thousand people perished and millions were left homeless. Lang came on the air in the midst of a benefit performance, and Lang, the real one, looked up at himself on the TV, smiled, and said, "Wow, I look really fat! This screen sucks!" Children who had survived the quake, including seven-year-old triplets wearing pioneer scarves and yellow T-shirts reading "We Are with You," came out to sing with Lang.

Lang watched a while and seemed moved by the children and their plaintive song. Turning the sound down, he said, "Thousands of the dead in Sichuan are children who died in their schools." He told the story of a woman found on all fours under stones, dead after several days, with her three-month-old baby beneath her, still breathing. The rescue workers found the woman's cell phone nearby and, on it, a text message to her child: "Dearest Loved One, If you can live, you must remember that I love you."

A day after the quake, Lang, with various other musicians, played a benefit in Beijing—one of many such events—and raised more than a million dollars. The Chinese I spoke with were extremely aware that the government's foursquare reaction to the earthquake—as opposed to the Burmese generals' refusal to accept foreign aid after the flooding of the Irrawaddy Delta—has helped to offset criticism of the way the Chinese military crushed dissent in Tibet earlier in the year. Lang is not a political animal, except in the facility with which he signals his generally liberal views to Western friends and reporters but skirts any criticism of the Chinese government. Not for him the blatant dissidence of Mstislav Rostropovich; he swims carefully in two oceans. "Before the earthquake, I always thought to myself that the Chinese people were very selfish," Lang said. "We let a very small country, Japan, defeat us, because we were not united. But now you see a real sense of national unity and sympathy."

The anniversary concert was a sentimental and musical success. Political and business grandees from the West, such as Alexander Haig and Hank Greenberg, sat together with various Communist Party officials in the front rows and applauded heartily after Lang raced his way up the Yellow River. When he was done, Lang swung around on the piano bench and said that he would now play a short Chopin étude "in memory of the earthquake victims," and here he was measured, soulful, precise, leaving all the fireworks to Chopin. The orchestra finished the evening with Beethoven's Sixth and an encore gallop through Leonard Bernstein's overture to "Candide."

At a gala dinner afterward, Lang sat at a huge table with Party officials, visiting emissaries, and local bazillionaires, along with Deng Xiaoping's daughter, Mao's translator, Zhou Enlai's niece, and other satellites of the Beijing élite. There were more flowers on each table than at a Mob funeral. The food was French, the wine expensive. I sat with a shirt manufacturer from Hong Kong who mentioned that he had forty-seven thousand employees; a woman at an adjacent table resembled an Eastern Jocelyn Wildenstein. There were many speeches, many toasts to U.S.-Chinese friendship, and at some point the wine ran out, which was a shame. The ex-foreign minister, Li Zhaoxing, got up to say that after the Philadelphia Orchestra came to Beijing, in 1973, "we had to wait five years for Mr. Deng Xiaoping to initiate reforms. . . . Ever since things opened up, we have been very happy." Excellent. Still no wine. Now Alexander Haig took the microphone and remarked that "Ping-Pong doesn't have the universality of music," which didn't quite have the music of "I'm in charge here," but it sufficed. As we all pondered this thought, a waiter arrived with more wine. Lang, who doesn't drink, made his excuses at around one and went home to sleep.

The next morning, a chauffeur-driven Audi sedan picked Lang up at the China World Hotel. (He has an eye for luxury cars—in our days together in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, he pointed out Maybachs, Bentleys, Rolls-Royces—but "I have a deal with Audi. So I ride in Audis.") He had agreed to teach a master class at Beijing's Central Conservatory, where he studied as a child. China's rise in affluence has been accompanied by a boom in cultural aspiration: forty million children are said to play the piano, a phenomenon often referred to in Beijing as "the Lang Lang effect."

Lang has a serene self-regard, for which he can hardly be blamed. His parents and many of his older relatives who were musicians and intellectuals suffered during the Cultural Revolution. By the time he was born, in 1982, the Chinese Communist Party had enacted the "one-child policy," to curb the population boom; one unintended consequence was a lot of Chinese princelings, darlings of their parents' focussed attentions. Lang Guoren was a talented musician who played the erhu, a sort of two-stringed fiddle, but he was thwarted by the Cultural Revolution, and worked as a police officer in Shenyang's entertainment district; Lang's mother, Xiulan, a former dancer, was a telephone operator. Their combined income was two hundred dollars a month, and they lived in a small barracks apartment on a local air-force base.

As we were driving past some of the more dilapidated apartment blocks, Lang remarked, "Where I grew up, the buildings were a lot worse than these. We paid fifteen dollars a month rent. You could smell the shit, animal or human, before you ever entered the building and then, the minute you walked in, *wham!* Compared to that, this is luxury, this is Fifth Avenue. We had no air-conditioning, no heat."

Lang's parents were determined that their son distinguish himself, and, in pursuit of that ambition, they paid half a year's wages for an upright piano and wedged it into their apartment. Lang began playing before the age of two. His autobiography, "Journey of a Thousand Miles," chronicles the prodigy's progress with a certain predictable cadence: the kind early teacher who saw his talent; the devoted but maddeningly overbearing father; the triumphant first competition at the age of five; an unexpected loss; then more victories, international schooling, and onward into the heavenly present.

Even before Lang's first competition, his father kept instructing his son's teacher that "Lang Lang must be the No. 1 pianist in all of China." In China, people have long talked in those terms: the No. 1 poet of the Tang dynasty, the No. 1 painter, the No. 1 tractor operator. Even when he was four, learning piano as much from watching Tom and Jerry cartoons (especially the episode where Tom plays Liszt's "Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2") as from his teachers, Lang was under tremendous pressure to succeed. One day, when he did not practice enough, Lang's father threw his favorite toys, an army of Transformers, out the window.

When Lang was nine, he and his father moved from Shenyang to the capital to find better teaching and with hopes of gaining entrance to the conservatory. Xiulan stayed home so that she could keep her job and send money to support them. Lang and his father moved into Fengtai, a grim neighborhood of Beijing, where they occupied a studio apartment a hundred feet square, with bunk beds, a piano, a tiny galley kitchen, and no heat.

"In Beijing, we had mice, and I kept worrying that they would bite Lang Lang on the hand," Lang Guoren said. "They didn't, but one mouse ate through one of his piano scores—the score of a Mozart piano sonata."

Winters are long, damp, and cold in Beijing; at night, while Lang practiced, his father would get in his bed and warm it for him. They often slept wearing nearly all the clothes they owned. Lang Guoren would wake at five and lock himself in the bathroom down the hall so that when his son woke he would not have to wait in line before washing up and beginning his day of practicing. Lang Lang was miserable: the neighbors banged on the walls when he practiced; his teacher, whom he refers to now as "Professor Angry," was harsh. Lang Guoren, who would ride his son to classes each morning on the wobbly handlebars of an ancient bicycle, distinguished himself as the loudest of stage parents. Once when Lang Lang came home late from a choral rehearsal where he had been playing piano, his father greeted him in a state of hysteria.

The infant Lang with his great-grandmother and his parents.

COURTESY LANG LANG

"You've missed nearly two hours of practicing, and you can never get them back," he shouted. "It's too late for everything! Everything is ruined!"

As he recounts in his autobiography, Lang tried to explain himself, but his father cut him off.

"You're a liar and you're lazy! You are horrible. And you have no reason to live. No reason at all."

"What are you talking about?"

"You can't go back to Shenyang in shame! Everyone will know you were not admitted to the conservatory! Everyone will know this teacher has fired you. Dying is the only way out."

Lang was crying, but his father would not stop.

"Take these pills!" Lang Guoren said, shoving a bottle into his hands. "Swallow all thirty pills right now! Everything will be over and you will be dead!"

Out on the apartment's balcony, the father screamed about jumping off, and the son was kicking him in the shins.

"If you won't jump, then swallow these pills! Swallow every last one," the father said.

Finally, Lang began punching the wall—so hard that his hands started to bleed. Shocked at the sight, Lang Guoren finally backed down. He apologized, kissing the boy's hands, and saying that he didn't want Lang Lang to die. "I just want you to practice."

Lang resolved not to look at his father, not to speak to his father, and not to play the piano. His rebellion lasted a few months. When he was ten, he was accepted at the Beijing conservatory.

In Lang's dressing room one day, while he was off signing autographs, I asked Lang Guoren about these moments in his relationship with Lang and the stark way they are portrayed in the autobiography, and he said, "It's painful to read those things. When reporters ask about it, or when people ask about it at public gatherings—book signings and so on—it makes me feel uncomfortable. And the other day at the movie, when the film was showing all those difficult things, too, you'll notice I didn't sit next to my wife or Lang Lang. I didn't want to draw attention to myself. But it really is hard. I don't really want to relive it. But, at the same time, it's true. It's honest."

BEFORE THE STORM

Rain tomorrow, but tonight the sky is clear, the stars shine.
Still, the rain's coming,
maybe enough to drown the seeds.
There's a wind from the sea pushing the clouds;
before you see them, you feel the wind.
Better look at the fields now,
see how they look before they're flooded.

A full moon. Yesterday a sheep escaped into the woods,
and not just any sheep—the ram, the whole future.
If we see him again, we'll see his bones.

The grass shudders a little; maybe the wind passed through it.
And the new leaves of the olives shudder in the same way.
Mice in the fields. Where the fox hunts,
tomorrow there'll be blood in the grass.
But the storm—the storm will wash it away.

In one window, there's a boy sitting.
He's been sent to bed—too early,
in his opinion. So he sits at the window—

Everything is settled now.
Where you are now is where you'll sleep, where you'll wake up in the morning.
The mountain stands like a beacon, to remind the night that the earth exists,

A light rain was falling when we arrived at the conservatory. The administrators, some teachers, and an eleven-year-old half-American, half-Chinese pianist named Vanessa waited for Lang Lang. They had no umbrellas. Vanessa handed Lang, her hero, a huge bouquet of lilies. (One of Lang Lang's daily occupational hazards is that he is forever being handed bouquets: when he arrives at an airport, when he finishes a concert, when he agrees to a press conference, a film screening, a banquet. When he is handed flowers, the first thing he does after smiling and saying thanks, is look around, eyes darting, for somewhere to ditch the flowers. For nine days, I felt like a maid of honor.)

We entered a modern auditorium, half filled with students. I drafted Vanessa as my translator.

"I feel pretty old today!" Lang said as he bounded up onstage. For the next hour and a half, he worked with three pianists—two young girls, no more than ten or eleven, who played Chopin, and a teen-age boy who tried to make his way through a complicated Brahms piece. He let them play their pieces to the end. He radiated patience, a desire to be thrilled. Especially with the girls, who showed more promise, he put out a lot of empathy and energy. To relax one of them, and to make it clear that she needed more dynamic expression in her playing, he sang to her, he conducted flowingly with his hands, he pretended to fall to the stage in mock delight. The boy was stiffer, and his piece more ambitious, and Lang, getting a little exasperated now, cut him off and, more sternly, began to talk with him about the intricacies of various passages and the piece's harmonic construction. The boy was not humiliated, but it was easy to see that he felt he had failed.

At the end, as a way to get across a lesson about subtlety (not a quality that Western critics always ascribe to Lang), he played a Liszt transcription from Wagner's "Tristan and Isolde," a soft, haunted piece.

"I thought this would help them, because they don't really think when they play, and I get tired of it," he said later. "I want them to listen to the music. I want them to make a good sentence."

After Lang signed scores of autographs and posed for pictures, he went off to eat lunch with his parents and some of the faculty in a small dining room next to the conservatory's cafeteria. The staff brought out dozens of dishes, and Lang, famished from the constant performance of his day, ate more than anyone, spinning the lazy Susan at the center of the table and scooping off heaps of shrimp, beef, eel, eggplant, string beans, tofu. His mood was as buoyant as ever, but he was frustrated and not a little insulted when one of the teachers told him that the students he had just worked with were "second and third tier." The first tier, the head explained, had gone abroad to study.

"I was really confounded when they told me these were second- and third-tier students," he said later. "To tell you the truth, I gave a lot, but I didn't really have a good time. I know that a lot of the better students are abroad, but I'm disappointed with the Central Conservatory. They'd better improve. The first student was O.K., the second tried, but the third kid just didn't have it. I could spend five days with him and make him a much better pianist, but he's in trouble. In the master classes I give in Europe or the United States, I don't find these basic problems. The Europeans have more technical problems. They don't practice enough. They're a little lazy. The Russians, generally, are still the best, mentally and physically."

Some Asian musicians, especially younger ones, get typed by critics as technically accomplished but cold, mechanical, and I asked Lang if he didn't think that this was a terrible stereotype. He didn't, exactly. "We're not traditionally connected to this music. Many Asians work very hard and play well, but there is no sense of the tradition, no sense of style or rhythm or harmonic that it mustn't be forgotten.

Above the sea, the clouds form as the wind rises,
dispersing them, giving them a sense of purpose.

Tomorrow the dawn won't come.
The sky won't go back to being the sky of day; it will go on as night,
except the stars will fade and vanish as the storm arrives,
lasting perhaps ten hours all together.
But the world as it was cannot return.

One by one, the lights of the village houses dim
and the mountain shines in the darkness with reflected light.

No sound. Only cats scuffling in doorways.
They smell the wind: time to make more cats.
Later, they prowl the streets, but the smell of the wind stalks them.
It's the same in the fields, confused by the smell of blood,
though for now only the wind rises; stars turn the field silver.

This far from the sea and still we know these signs.
The night is an open book.
But the world beyond the night remains a mystery.

—Louise Glück

structure." The student at the master class, he said, "played Brahms as if it were Chopin, with mixed-up tempos. Everything is unclear somehow. Some Asian players are also very stiff or cold. So there really are problems. Of course, all this depends on the individual, but it's a basic problem. If you look at eighty per cent of Asian players, they have problems that Europeans don't have. With Brahms, for instance, you need to be direct. You can't be polite or scared. I try to be polite when I tell students all this, but I can't avoid the subject.

"Western classical music in China is usually like Chinese food in the West—familiar but not quite the real thing," he said. "A lot of musicians here don't do much beyond play the notes themselves. There is no sense of phrasing. The sound is nice enough, but there is none of that intensity. That is what I had to come to the West to learn. In China, I came to love Vladimir Horowitz and Arthur Rubinstein. I tried to create a combination of them in my own voice. Horowitz is more dynamic, a better technician, more brilliant. Rubinstein makes more mistakes, maybe, but there is more warmth, a warm heart, even if his technique is not on the level of Horowitz."

Lang is equally affectionate and tough-minded about the audiences in China. He described the way people talk and misbehave while he plays, especially in the cities outside Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai. "Sometimes some of them are drinking beer in the seats, or they can even talk on their cell phones and then hold the phones up and say, 'Listen, it's Lang Lang playing.' When I play in these cities, I play more Chinese music than usual—maybe half and half. If you play two hours of Beethoven for those audiences, their heads will explode."

Later, he said, "Look, I don't really feel prejudice. . . . When I first came to London, someone from the BBC asked me, 'Why do you play Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto? Shouldn't you play Chinese music on a Chinese instrument?' I was just eighteen, and I was pretty stunned. He said, 'Can you really understand the Western classical repertoire? It would be like us playing Chinese music.' But I never got angry." After Lang played his concert, the same interviewer offered nothing but compliments. Lang smiled and said, "I think he thought I got the music."

When Lang was fifteen, he left China and his mother and, with his father, went to America to study at the Curtis Institute. A training ground for the Philadelphia Orchestra and for musicians as various as Leonard Bernstein and Nino Rota, Curtis is a more intimate school than Juilliard, and its students are embraced by generosity. Lang and his father were amazed by the spacious apartment that they shared and the privileges that they were given. Not only do students receive a full scholarship but, like all keyboard students, Lang got his own Steinway grand in his rooms—a far cry from the unheated hovel in downtown Beijing. "Every night, in the middle of the night, Lang Lang would wake up and go in just to see if the piano was still there," his mother said. "He was worried it might be taken away or was a dream."

Lang's teacher at Curtis was Gary Graffman, a former prodigy himself, who had been a student there in the thirties. Graffman, who is seventy-nine, studied with Rudolph Serkin and Vladimir Horowitz and had a distinguished career as a soloist until an injury on his right hand, when he was fifty, slowed him down. Graffman worked closely with Lang and thought that he was an "astonishing" prospect, particularly in the virtuoso repertory of Rachmaninoff and Tchaikovsky. The only complication was Lang's father, who continued to divide his time between hectoring his son and cornering teachers to insist on Lang's brilliance. "The father was very controlling," Graffman said. "Most of my colleagues were not happy with him, as they are not happy with the parents of many of the Asian students. I once told him, 'You are worse than a Jewish mother.' "

At one point, Lang and his father lived in a building at Thirteenth and

Spruce, where a street sign said that the neighborhood was a welcome place for gays, straights, bisexuals, and transsexuals. "The gay culture was a little bit of a shock," Lang recalled. "There was a couple nearby kissing, and I thought, These American people are so friendly. We'd heard about 'gay' in China, but we didn't really know how it all worked." Lang translated the street sign for Lang Guoren. "He was very . . . impressed," Lang said.

Soon, Lang began to win favorable attention for his recitals. Graffman was never wild about Lang's gyrations—"He is looking up to the heavens all the time, for I don't know what"—but he could sense that he had a real charisma in performance. "Rubinstein walked out onstage and people were already on the edge of their chairs, while Serkin looked like the janitor," he said. "With Lang Lang, everyone is there with their tongues hanging out. It's not from the gyrations. He projects sound. In my opinion, he will sometimes overdo a phrase, but less than he used to. I was criticized for not letting myself go enough, so it's subjective. He can physically do things that I never could."

The annals of classical music are filled with episodes of the big break: Bernstein, in 1943, replacing Bruno Walter at Carnegie Hall with a few hours' notice, and leading the New York Philharmonic through a thrilling rendition of Strauss's "Don Quixote"; a teenage André Watts, in 1963, filling in for Glenn Gould and playing the Liszt Piano Concerto No. 1 in E-Flat with the New York Philharmonic and Bernstein, a performance so stunning that even the musicians stood to applaud. In the spring of 1999, when Lang was sixteen, he went to New York and in a single afternoon auditioned for the Cleveland Orchestra, at Carnegie Hall, and for a manager of the Chicago Symphony. His listeners were impressed but, for the moment, offered no jobs. "To save money, I took the Chinatown bus back to Philadelphia," Lang said.

A few months later, at the summer Ravinia Festival, in Chicago, with just a half day's advance notice, Lang was summoned to fill in for André Watts, who had been scheduled to perform with Eschenbach and the Chicago Symphony at the festival's gala benefit. There were three thousand people in the seats and fifteen thousand more on the lawns beyond. Lang was preceded on the bill by two other pianists, Leon Fleisher and Alicia de Larrocha. With Lang waiting in the wings, Isaac Stern went out onstage and announced that Watts was ill but that no one would be disappointed by the Chinese teen-ager who was about to play. The piece was Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-Flat Minor, and Lang swears that he imagined Michael Jordan's slam dunk as he struck the first resounding chords and Tiger Woods's golf swing while he played the octaves. The performance, Lang recalls, was "the moment of a lifetime." There was endless applause, toasts from Stern on the "launch of a long and brilliant career," raves from John von Rhein, in the Chicago *Tribune,* pronouncing Lang "the star of the evening." As the post-concert dinner was ending—by then, it was well after midnight—Eschenbach and a few others asked Lang if he would give them a private recital, right away, of Bach's Goldberg Variations, a set of linked pieces that runs close to an hour.

PROSE-CUTION
DAY
03
TIME
02:45
DEFENSE

"It's clear from the replay that it was a leading question."

"I don't have the score," Lang said.

"Surely you have it memorized," Zarin Mehta, the festival's executive director, said.

Lang was not sure that he did, but he dared ask only where he could play. A hall nearby was opened up. Lang understood the request: Eschenbach and Mehta wanted to echo the historic link with Watts, who had replaced Gould—the signature performer of the Goldberg Variations. As they walked into the theatre and Eschenbach turned on the lights and found a piano stool, Lang's father whispered, "Don't worry, you'll remember every single note."

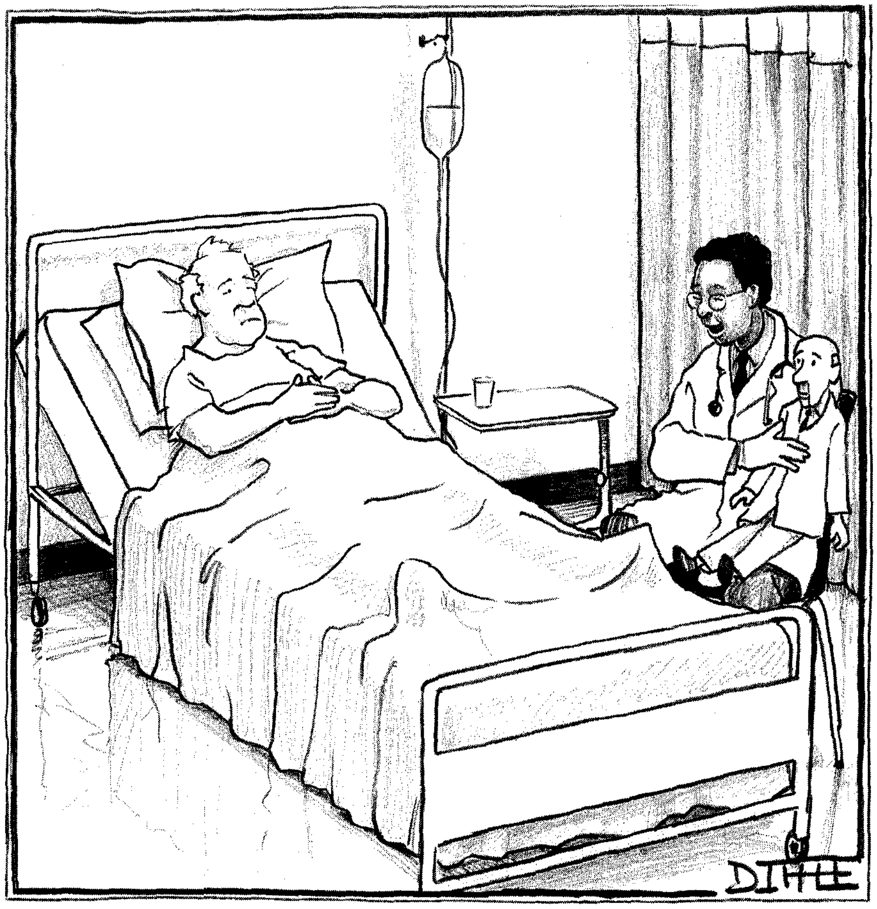
Lang did remember every note, and, though he was not a Bach specialist, played well enough to impress his small, rarefied audience. He went to sleep at 6 A.M., and it is a part of Lang's true-life mythology to say that he woke into an entirely new life. "When I turned eighteen, I bought a house in Philadelphia, for about half a million dollars," he told me. "I was so happy. This was in the year 2000, and I thought that this was the best gift, a good way to begin my twenty-first-century American dream."

The morning after the master class, we drove far out of Beijing to the Ah Rong television studios, where Lang was scheduled to film a commercial for the China Merchants Bank.

It was part of his Olympic master plan and his over-all marketing portfolio. "This all started when I signed with Deutsche Grammophon," he said. He was twenty. "They knew I was young, and they wanted to do something with that. If they see a young face, an interesting figure or something, they try to do something. It's not easy to stand out in a record store." Almost from the time he entered his teens, Lang began to experiment with his outfits.

"As a kid, I loved the idea of white tie and tails because I saw it in that Tom and Jerry cartoon," he said. "Also, it was something Chinese didn't have. I thought, Cool! Great! So when I was six I got a tuxedo with tails. Then I started wearing outfits based on the Peking Opera to perform. This was a time when very few people didn't know the difference between Western piano music and Chinese music. Then I got a suit with sneakers for a competition. Then in America I went and got tails, bought them in L.A. Then I found myself in a five-star hotel in Europe and I realized that the waiters were wearing tails. Was the waiter my colleague? This was when I was about sixteen, and I decided I needed a cooler look. So I went to Tang-dynasty suits: red, pink, blue. Real energy! I finally decided to be myself. Chinese-style suits, no tie, a little sparkle in summer." Now he wears mainly Italian clothes—Armani, Zegna, Dolce & Gabbana—and his father keeps up, wearing Montblanc shades and Gucci loafers.

The trip to the Ah Rong studios was taking twice as long as usual. The traffic was thick, especially as we got to the outskirts, where the newly rich live in gated communities with names like Aix-en-Provence and Little Venice. At last, we arrived, and pulled up to a huge hangar-like building. Around fifty young stagehands, electricians, and other workers scurried around the car and greeted Lang. He gravely regarded the vast soundstage: a baby-grand piano, painted grenadine red, had been hoisted onto a spiralling white stage. Workers were touching up scuff marks on the stage. Like surgeons, or engineers in a nuclear reactor, they wore sterile booties.



"I'm afraid Mr. Bickles has some bad news."

• •

"I like it," Lang Lang said, nodding. "Very nice." Then he and his entourage climbed some metal stairs to his dressing room. A considerable lunch had been provided. It was only eleven-thirty, but there was a whole carp in brown sauce, chicken and beef dishes, and Styrofoam crates of freshly steamed rice. Downstairs, the studio workers had bought dumplings from a vending cart, and ate sitting on the ground.

A young woman in charge of Lang's wardrobe showed him his outfit: red tails and red pants, white shirt, black bow tie. He would mime playing "The Yellow River Concerto"—of course. Later on, technicians would film a cheering crowd at a football stadium in Shanghai and then, relying on digital manipulation, would make it seem as if Lang Lang were performing before bank-mad masses. "Sometimes I hear 'The Yellow River Concerto' in my sleep," Lang said.

In one corner four young women chatted about the costume. They were members of Lang Lang's fan club—the Beijing division—and they were there to write up the filming for their Internet site. Lang mentions his interest in girls fairly often, but, like a dutiful celebrity, he told me that he had "no one special at the moment." He added, "I am so busy." The girls from the fan club were off limits. "It's a bad idea to hit on the fans."

Lang handed me a storyboard for the commercial. The ad opens with a young girl making the sign of a heart with her hands. Then a boatload of rowers is shown steaming downriver as the narrator speaks of the power of synergy. Cut to Lang Lang, in his red tuxedo, pounding away at the piano, head thrown back, lifting his right hand in a gesture of ecstasy, while the masses applaud. As the music reaches a crescendo, so, too, does the hysteria of the crowd. A voice-over declares, "We are connected, between hearts and hands, in the power of China." Then Lang Lang makes the sign of a heart with his hands.

"It seems a little obscure," I said.

Lang shrugged and winked.

"It's patriotic stuff," he said. "You'll see."

With that, Lang walked up a white staircase and sat down at the red piano. The instrument had been fitted out with hidden lights above the keyboard and underneath the soundboard; many more lights hovered above. Lang was sweating profusely before he'd hit a single note.

"Anyone have a towel?" he asked.

Two young women rushed over and patted him dry. Another knelt before him and polished his shoes and then the soles of his shoes. Another kept handing him bottled water. Lang Lang's capacity for eating is outstripped only by his need for hydration. His mother, who travels with Lang even more than his father these days, is ever solicitous, carrying at least two bottles of water in her handbag at all times.

Lang is so young, so engaging, that he can seem guileless. But he has an awareness of the commercial world that few of his peers can equal. With the help of his handlers in New York, he has learned how other classical musicians developed and exploited their star power, how Horowitz and Bernstein, Herbert von Karajan and Anne-Sophie Mutter and Yo-Yo Ma took the extra steps that provided more celebrity and greater fees. None of them, however, approached the maestro of the commercial, Luciano Pavarotti, but Lang was intent on trying.

"Pavarotti was a genius at marketing—he made himself a brand," Lang said. Herbert Breslin, who was Pavarotti's manager for more than thirty years, told me that, while classical music is a "tiddlysnit business," the danger of commercial obsession is that the foundation, the artistry, will be debased or lost.

With the commercials, the film, and the autobiography a fait accompli, Lang was now considering working with movie composers—"like Howard Shore, who did 'Lord of the Rings' "—and developing a Hollywood version of his life story.

On the way back to Beijing, Lang fielded calls about new contracts. Though it's hard to imagine some artists working the phones with quite the same ferocity, he said, "Look, it feels great. I used to get a hundred dollars for a concert, and I still loved it. Now I do the same thing and get so much more!"

For a year or two after the Ravinia Festival, Lang Lang kept faith with the critics, even as he booked more and more concerts. John von Rhein, of the Chicago *Tribune*, was no less enthusiastic about Lang's promise when he filled in for Richard Goode in March, 2000, than he had been when Lang filled in for Watts. Lang returned to the Ravinia Festival for the seventh time in 2002, but now von Rhein had lost patience. Of Lang's performance he said, "All he needed was a white sequined suit and a candelabra and Ravinia could have sold him as the new Liberace." That was kind compared to the drubbing that Anthony Tommasini, of the *Times*, administered the same year. Tommasini wrote that he could abide neither Lang's physical contortions—"his sweeping arm gestures, his twisted posture"—nor his "contorted music making." The next year, on the occasion of Lang's solo début at Carnegie Hall, Tommasini whacked him for an "incoherent, self-indulgent and slam-bang crass" performance:

> Not every musician has to be an intellectually searching artist, but Mr. Lang's head seems to be so full of his own hype that there can't be much room left for analytic thinking. The opening phrase of the first work on his program, the breezy main theme of Schumann's "Abegg" Variations, was promising, played with grace and lovely sound. But in the immediate repeat of that phrase Mr. Lang was already up to his attention-grabbing tricks: coyly prolonging the upbeat, milking the tune emotively, making everything cute.

At that concert, which was recorded for both audio and video, Lang ran roughshod over pieces by Schumann, Haydn, and Schubert, but the applause from the audience was warm, and when he changed from tails into a silk Chinese jacket and brought out his father to play the erhu in a duet known as "Horses," the reception was thunderous. After hearing the first encore, Schumann's "Träumerei," "yanked around," Tommasini had had enough. He told readers of the *Times* that he walked out, lest he be "a party pooper, let alone impede the future of classical music."

Suddenly, Lang Lang was "Bang Bang"—all affect and no depth, an over-the-top fop, whose playing was the musical version of what the Russians call *poshlost:* cheap, kitschy, lily-gilding of the lowest order. Even as the world's best orchestras, conductors, and concert halls were inviting him to perform and record with them, the critical disenchantment grew. So harsh was one of von Rheim's broadsides that Eschenbach, playing the role of father-protector, demanded a retraction. None was forthcoming.

In recent years, the pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim, who is based in Berlin, has taken over from Gary Graffman as Lang Lang's teacher-protector. Barenboim has tried to shield his charge from critical pain. "When Lang Lang started out, so many critics hailed him as something unique, for all reasons, musical and national," he said. "But it's very difficult when you are put on a pedestal to stay there."

Every three or four months, Lang halts his impossible schedule and goes to Berlin for ten days or so and, in relative isolation, works with Barenboim. Even though Lang's concert repertoire still emphasizes concertos by Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, and Grieg, and other virtuoso set pieces, he and Barenboim have been exploring a more mature repertoire, including the Goldberg Variations and the late sonatas of Schubert and Beethoven.

"Lang Lang has the kind of talent that is unlimited," Barenboim said. "His future depends almost exclusively on him, how he looks up to his talent, how he grows, and everything around it. There is a whole culture about a person. The career of a jazz or a pop musician might be intense, like Lang Lang's life, but the content is different, and the career of a classical musician tends to be much longer. If he maintains his modesty and discipline, he could have the most wonderful long life as a musician. Most people don't have the luxury or the chance to be a master of their own destiny. So whatever he achieves in life will be the result of his talent. God forbid, he stops looking after his talent."

One morning, while we were waiting to board a flight to the southeastern city of Guangzhou, where Lang was to perform another concert with the Philadelphia Orchestra, he admitted that the disapproval of peers is far more daunting than the crabbed notices of the critics. He told me how, some years ago, in different encounters, one prominent soloist told him to give up on Mozart and another that he was hopeless with Beethoven.

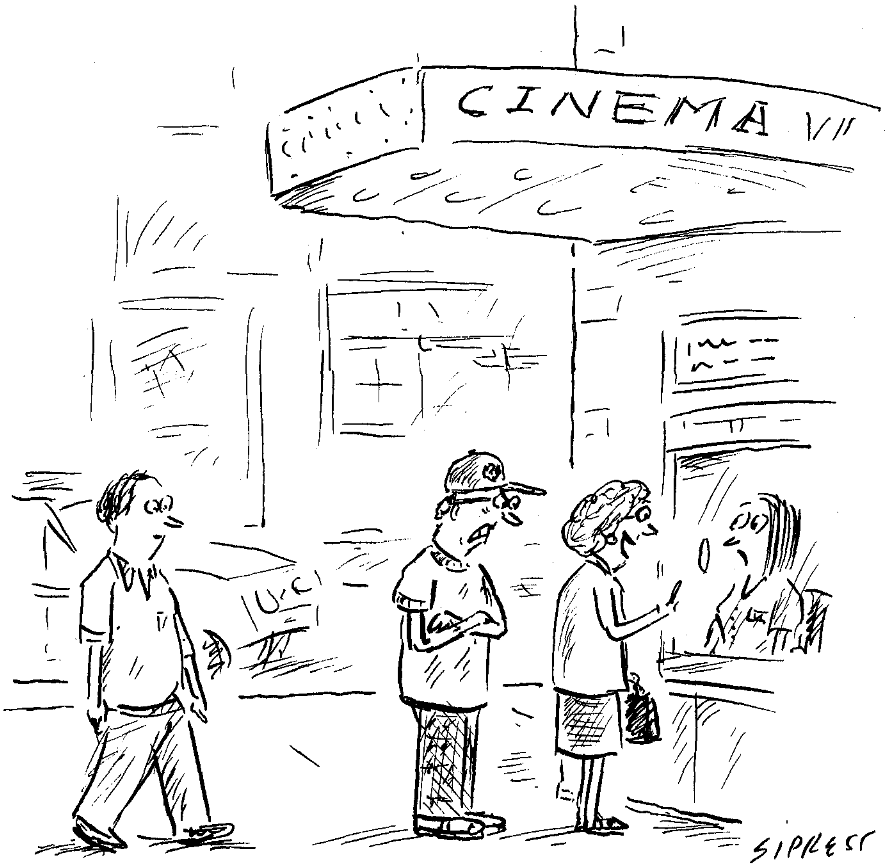
"It was scary as hell," Lang said. "A player who can't deal with Mozart and Beethoven might as well go home. It's true that, as a Chinese, I feel more immediately close to the Eastern Europeans—like those little girls you heard playing Chopin. Compare it to the discomfort of the boy playing Brahms. Sometimes, when a Chinese pianist plays something like Brahms, it's not a culture clash—it's a culture crash."

And yet despite the warnings and admonitions Lang is determined to expand his repertoire. He is not a deeply intellectual musician, nor is he hesitant to dismiss whole categories of music with the wave of a hand: he is bewildered by Wagnerian opera ("I don't know how someone can sit through the 'Ring' ") and seems not to like much Western classical music after early Schoenberg. But he is ambitious and listens solely to that ambition. In Guangzhou, in an almost comically sprawling suite (it featured one room that was entirely taken up with a rock garden), Lang ended a long day of book signings, a movie première, and an interminable dinner with local well-wishers by practicing one of Beethoven's finger-exploding late sonatas, Opus 101. It was nearing midnight. Lang sat at the piano—a cheap upright—and looked out for a while at the Guangzhou skyline, with the boats snaking slowly along the Pearl River. Then he closed his eyes, made a figure-eight motion with his neck (a tiny *pop!*), and settled into the opening bars. There was a knock at the door, but he ignored it. There was a radio playing somewhere, but he ignored it. His concentration was such that someone could have dangled upside down above the piano and he wouldn't have missed a note. He was lost in the sonata—playing and replaying passages, clearly summoning in his mind the instructions he'd got from Barenboim in Berlin a few weeks before. When he stopped playing, he looked at his hands splayed out in front of his eyes. They are large but not freakish. Lang's handshake is like a fighter's, a bit limp, so as not to encourage muscular squeezing from anyone. "These late sonatas are so complex, so many voices," he said. After an hour, I left him.

Lang played the final concerts with the Philadelphia Orchestra in Guangzhou and Shanghai and set off on a tour of various European halls. The next time I saw him was in mid-July, when he came to New York to play Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto with the Philharmonic, in Central Park. It would not have mattered much if the playing had been third rate, so cool was the evening, so light the mood. Lang played the red Steinway grand, which he was auctioning off on his Web site to raise money for earthquake victims. The sound system was weak; at times, it was as if tens of thousands of people had gathered to listen to a clock radio with the volume set on "4." And yet Lang still managed to project, running through the breakneck passages with no more effort than a champion racehorse rounding a corner. This was just the sort of bravura piece and hyper-public occasion of which he had become a master. In the *Times*, Tommasini, Lang's critical nemesis just five years ago, pronounced his playing "exciting and brilliant": "He vanquished the technical challenges, playing with utter command and disarming joy, bringing out inner voices and rhythmic syncopations that caught his ear."

Lang's publisher, Stephen Rubin, had arranged a post-concert dinner for him at Shun Lee West, near Lincoln Center. Lang arrived late with his mother, still coated with the fairy dust of applause and congratulations. He was especially glad to see Gary Graffman, his former teacher. Graffman beamed as he talked about new and younger Chinese musicians he was meeting at the Curtis Institute. The banquet was long, but it never flagged, and at one point Lang turned to Graffman and said, "This all turned out pretty well, don't you think?"

"I think so," the teacher said. "I really think so." ♦

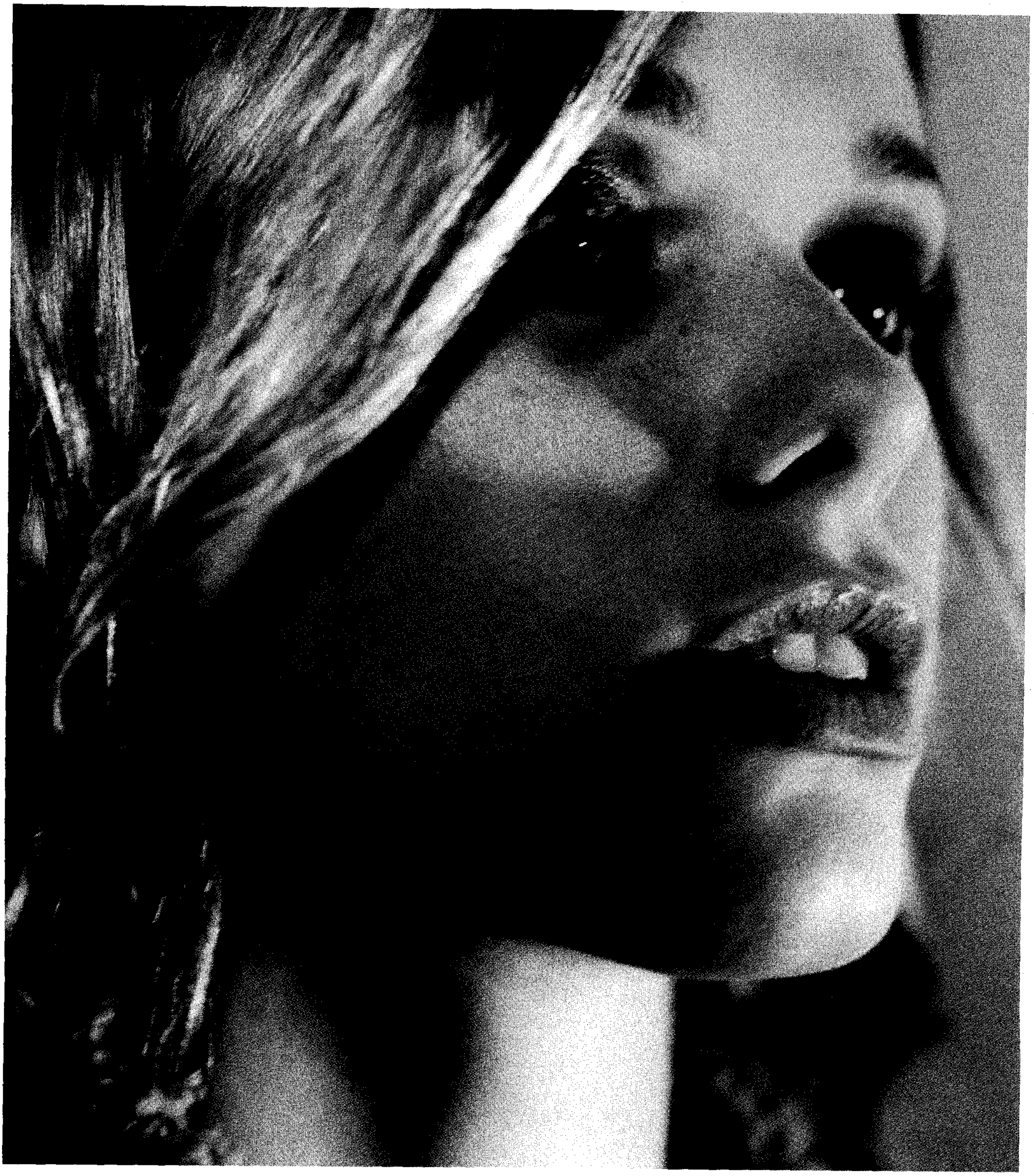


"One senior and one refuses to accept he's a senior."

FICTION

CLARA

BY ROBERTO BOLAÑO



She had big breasts, slim legs, and blue eyes. That's how I like to remember her. I don't know why I fell madly in love with her, but I did, and at the start, I mean for the first days, the first hours, it all went fine; then Clara returned to the city where she lived, in the south of Spain (she'd been on vacation in Barcelona), and everything began to fall apart.

One night I dreamed of an angel: I walked into a huge, empty bar and saw him sitting in a corner with his elbows on the table and a cup of milky coffee in front of him. She's the love of your life, he said, looking up at me, and the force of his gaze, the fire in his eyes, threw me right across the room. I started shouting, Waiter, waiter, then opened my eyes and escaped from that miserable dream. Other nights I didn't dream of anyone, but I woke up in tears. Meanwhile, Clara and I were writing to each other. Her letters were brief. Hi, how are you, it's raining, I love you, bye. At first, those letters scared me. It's all over, I thought. Nevertheless, after inspecting them more carefully, I reached the conclusion that her epistolary concision was motivated by a desire to avoid grammatical errors. Clara was proud. She couldn't write well, and she didn't want to let it show, even if it meant hurting me by seeming cold.

She was eighteen at the time. She had quit high school and was studying music at a private academy, and drawing with a retired landscape painter, but she wasn't all that interested in music, and it was pretty much the same with painting: she liked it, but couldn't get passionate about it. One day, I received a letter informing me, in her usual terse fashion, that she was going to take part in a beauty contest. My response, which filled three double-sided pages, was an extravagant paean to her calm beauty, the sweetness of her eyes, the perfection of her figure, etc. The letter was a triumph of bad taste, and when I had finished it I wondered whether or not I should send it, but in the end I did.

A few weeks went by before I heard from her. I could have called, but I didn't want to intrude, and also at the time I was broke. Clara came in second in the contest and was depressed for a week. Surprisingly, she sent me a telegram, which read, "SECOND PLACE. STOP. GOT YOUR LETTER. STOP. COME AND SEE ME."

A week later, I took a train bound for the city where she lived, the first one leaving that day. Before that, of course—I mean after the telegram—we had spoken on the phone, and I had heard the story of the beauty contest a number of times. It had had a big impact on Clara, apparently. So I packed my bags and, as soon as I could, got on a train, and very early the next morning there I was, in that unfamiliar city. I arrived at Clara's apartment at nine-thirty, after having a coffee at the station and smoking a few cigarettes to kill some time. A fat woman with messy hair opened the door, and when I said I had come to see Clara she looked at me as if I were a lamb on its way to slaughter. For a few minutes (they seemed extraordinarily long at the time, and, thinking the whole thing over, later on, I realized that in fact they were), I sat and waited for Clara in the living room, a living room that seemed welcoming, for no special reason, overly cluttered but welcoming and full of light. When Clara made her entrance, it was like the apparition of a goddess. I know it was a stupid thing to think—and it's a stupid thing to say—but that's how it was.

The following days were pleasant and unpleasant. We saw a lot of films, almost one a day; we made love (I was the first guy that Clara had slept with, which seemed incidental or anecdotal, but in the end it would cost me dearly); we walked around; I met Clara's friends; we went to two horrific parties; and I asked her to come and live with me in Barcelona. Of course, at that stage I knew what her answer would be. After a month, I took a night train back to Barcelona; I remember it was a terrible trip.

Soon after that, Clara explained in a letter, the longest one she ever sent me, why she couldn't go on: I was putting her under intolerable pressure (by suggesting that we live together); it was all over. After that, we talked three or four times on the phone. I think I also wrote her a letter full of insults and declarations of love. Once, when I was travelling to Morocco, I called her from the hotel where I was staying, in Algeciras, and that time we were able to have a civilized conversation. At least, she thought it was civilized. Or I did.

Years later, Clara told me about the parts of her life I had missed out on. And then, years after that, both she and some of her friends told me her life story all over again, starting from the beginning, or from the point where we split up—since I was a minor character, it didn't make any difference to them, or to me, really, although that wasn't so easy to admit. Predictably, not long after the end of our engagement (I know "engagement" is hyperbolic, but it's the best word I can find) Clara got married, and the lucky man was, logically enough, one of the friends I had met on my first trip to her city.

But, before that, she had psychological problems: she used to dream about rats; at night she would hear them in her bedroom, and for months, the months leading up to her marriage, she had to sleep on the sofa in the living room. I'm guessing those damned rats disappeared after the wedding.

So. Clara got married. And the husband, Clara's dear husband, surprised everyone, even her. After one or two years, I'm not sure, exactly—Clara told me, but I've forgotten—they split up. It wasn't an amicable separation. The guy shouted, Clara shouted, she slapped him, he responded with a punch that dislocated her jaw. Sometimes, when I'm alone and can't get to sleep but don't feel up to switching on the light, I think of Clara, who came in second in that beauty contest, with her jaw hanging loose, unable to get it back in place on her own, driving to the nearest hospital with one hand on the wheel and the other supporting her jawbone. I'd like to find it funny, but I can't.

What I do find funny is her wedding night. She'd had an operation for hemorrhoids the day before, so I guess she was still a bit groggy. Or maybe not. I never asked her if she was able to make love with her husband. I think they'd done it before the operation. Anyway, what does it matter? All these details say more about me than they do about her.

In any case, Clara split up with her husband a year or two after the wedding, and started studying. She couldn't go to a university because she hadn't finished high school, but she tried everything else: photography, painting again (I don't know why, but she always thought she could be a good painter), music, typing, I.T., all those one-year diploma courses supposedly leading to job opportunities that desperate young people keep jumping at or falling for. And although Clara was happy to have escaped from a husband who beat her, deep down she was desperate.

The rats came back, and the depression, and the mysterious illnesses. For two

JUST LOOMIS, "UNTITLED" [2002]

or three years she was treated for an ulcer, until the doctors finally realized that there was nothing wrong, at least not in her stomach. Around that time she met Luis, an executive; they became lovers, and he persuaded her to study something related to business administration. According to Clara's friends, she had at last found the love of her life. Before long, they were living together; Clara got a job in an office, a legal firm or some kind of agency—a really fun job, Clara said, without a hint of irony—and her life seemed to be on track, for good this time. Luis was a sensitive guy (he never hit her), and cultured (he was, I believe, one of the two million Spaniards who bought the complete works of Mozart in installments), and patient, too (he listened, he listened to her every night and on the weekends). Clara didn't have much to say for herself, but she never got tired of saying it. She wasn't fretting over the beauty contest anymore, although she did bring it up from time to time; now it was all about her periods of depression, her mental instability, the pictures she wanted to paint but hadn't.

I don't know why they didn't have children; maybe they didn't have time, although, according to Clara, Luis was crazy about kids. She used her time to study, and listen to music (Mozart, but other composers, too, later on), and take photographs, which she never showed anyone. In her own obscure and useless way, she tried to defend her freedom, tried to learn.

At the age of thirty-one, she slept with a guy from the office. It was just something that happened, not a big deal, at least for the two of them, but Clara made the mistake of telling Luis. The fight was appalling. Luis smashed a chair or a painting he had bought, got drunk, and didn't talk to her for a month. According to Clara, from that day on nothing was the same, in spite of the reconciliation, in spite of their trip to a town on the coast, a rather sad and dull trip, as it turned out.

By the time she was thirty-two, her sex life was almost nonexistent. Shortly before she turned thirty-three, Luis told her that he loved her, he respected her, he would never forget her, but for some months he had been seeing someone from work, who was divorced and had children, a nice, understanding woman, and he was planning to go and live with her.

On the surface, Clara took the breakup pretty well (it was the first time someone had left her). But a few months later she lapsed into depression again and had to take some time off work and undergo psychiatric treatment, which didn't help much. The pills she was given inhibited her sexually, although she did make some willful but unsatisfactory attempts to sleep with other men, including me. She started talking about the rats again; they wouldn't leave her alone. When she got nervous she would constantly go to the bathroom. (The first night we slept together, she must have got up to pee ten times.) She talked about herself in the third person. In fact, she once told me that there were three Claras in her soul: a little girl, an old crone enslaved by her family, and a young woman, the real Clara, who wanted to get out of that city forever, who wanted to paint, and take photos, and travel, and live. For the first few days after we got back together, I feared for her life. Sometimes I wouldn't even go out shopping because I was scared of coming back and finding her dead, but as the days went by my fears gradually faded, and I realized (or perhaps conveniently convinced myself) that Clara wasn't going to take her life; she wasn't going to throw herself off the balcony of her apartment—she wasn't going to do anything.

Soon after that, I left her, but this time I decided to call her every so often and stay in touch with one of her friends, who could fill me in (if only now and then). That's how I came to know a few things it might have been easier not to know, stories that did nothing for my peace of mind, the kind of news an egotist should always take care to avoid.

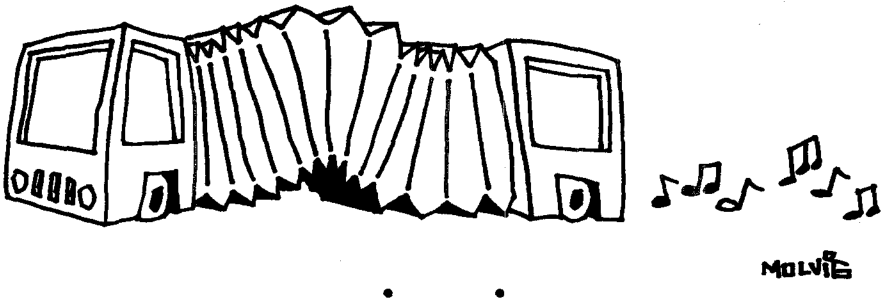
Clara went back to work (the new pills she was taking had done wonders for her outlook), and, shortly afterward, management, perhaps to pay her back for such a long absence, transferred her to a branch in another Andalusian city, though not very far away. She moved, started going to the gym (at thirty-four she was no longer the beauty I had known when I was seventeen), and made new friends. That's how she met Paco, who was divorced, like her.

Before long, they were married. At first, Paco would tell anyone willing to listen what he thought of Clara's photos and paintings. And Clara thought that Paco was intelligent and had good taste. As time passed, however, Paco lost interest in Clara's aesthetic efforts and wanted to have a child. Clara was thirty-five and at first she wasn't keen on the idea, but she gave in, and they had a child. According to Clara, the child satisfied all her yearnings—that was the word she used. According to her friends, she was getting steadily worse, whatever that meant.

On one occasion, for reasons irrelevant to this story, I had to spend a night in Clara's city. I called her from my hotel, told her where I was, and arranged to meet her the following day. I would have preferred to see her that night, but after our previous encounter Clara regarded me, and perhaps with good reason, as a kind of enemy, so I didn't insist.

She was almost unrecognizable. She had put on weight, and in spite of the makeup her face looked worn, not so much by time as by frustration, which surprised me, since I'd never really thought that Clara aspired to anything. And if you don't aspire to anything, how can you be frustrated? Her smile had also undergone a transformation. Before, it had been warm and slightly dumb, the smile of a young lady from a provincial capital, but it had become a mean, hurtful smile, and it was easy to read the resentment, rage, and envy behind it. We kissed each other on the cheeks like a pair of idiots and then sat down; for a while we didn't know what to say. I was the one who broke the silence. I asked about her son; she told me he was at day care, and then asked me about mine. He's fine, I said. We both realized that, unless we did something, the meeting was going to become unbearably sad. How do I look? Clara asked. It was as if she were asking me to slap her. Same as ever, I replied automatically. I remember we had a coffee, then went for a walk along an avenue lined with plane trees, which led directly to the station. My train was about to leave. We said goodbye at the door of the station, and that was the last time I saw her.

We did, however, talk on the phone before she died. I used to call her every three or four months. I had learned from experience not to touch on personal or intimate matters (a bit like sticking to sports when chatting with strangers in bars),



so we talked about her family, which in those conversations remained as abstract as a Cubist poem, or her son's school, or her job; she was still at the same office, and over the years she had got to know all about her colleagues and their lives, and all the problems the executives were having—those secrets gave her an intense and perhaps excessive pleasure. On one occasion, I tried to get her to say something about her husband, but she clammed up at that. You deserve the best, I told her. That's strange, Clara replied. What's strange? I asked. It's strange that you should say that—you, of all people, she said. I quickly tried to change the subject, claimed I was running out of coins (I've never had a phone of my own, and never will—I always called from a public phone booth), hurriedly said goodbye, and hung up. I realized I couldn't face another argument with Clara; I couldn't listen to her working up another one of her endless justifications.

One night not long ago, she told me she had cancer. Her voice was as cold as ever, that voice in which she always recounted her life with the detachment of a bad storyteller, putting exclamation marks in all the wrong places, and passing over what she should have gone into, the parts where she should have cut to the quick. I remember asking her if she had already been to see a doctor, as if she had diagnosed the cancer herself (or with Paco's help). Of course, she said. At the other end of the line I heard something like a croak. She was laughing. We talked briefly about our children, then (she must have been feeling lonely or bored) she asked me to tell her something about my life. I made up something on the spot, and said I'd call her back the following week. That night I slept very badly. I had one nightmare after another, and woke up suddenly, shouting, convinced that Clara had lied to me: she didn't have cancer; something was happening to her, for sure, the way things had been happening for the past twenty years, little, fucked-up things, all full of shit and smiles, but she didn't have cancer. It was five in the morning. I got up and walked to the Paseo Marítimo, with the wind at my back, which was strange, because the wind usually blows in from the sea, and hardly ever in the opposite direction. I didn't stop until I got to the phone booth next to one of the biggest cafés on the Paseo. The terrace was empty, the chairs were chained to the tables. A little way off, right by the sea, a homeless guy was sleeping on a bench, with his knees drawn up, and every now and then he shuddered, as if he were having bad dreams.

My address book contained only one other number in Clara's city. I called it. After a long time, a woman's voice answered. I said who I was, but suddenly found I couldn't say anything more. I thought she'd hang up, but I heard the click of a lighter and smoke rushing in through lips. Are you still there? the woman asked. Yes, I said. Have you talked to Clara? Yes, I said. Did she tell you she had cancer? Yes, I said. Well, it's true.

All the years since I had met Clara suddenly came tumbling down on top of me, everything my life had been, most of it nothing to do with her. I don't know what else the woman said at the other end of the line, hundreds of miles away; I think I began to cry in spite of myself, like in the poem by Rubén Darío. I fumbled in my pockets for cigarettes, listened to fragments of stories: doctors, operations, mastectomies, discussions, different points of view, deliberations, the activities of a Clara I couldn't know or touch or help, not now. A Clara who could never save me now.

When I hung up, the homeless guy was standing about five feet away. I hadn't heard him approaching. He was very tall, too warmly dressed for the season, and he was staring at me, as if he were nearsighted, or worried I might make a sudden move. I was so sad I didn't even get scared, although afterward, walking back through the twisting streets of the town center, I realized that, seeing him, I had forgotten Clara for an instant, for the first time, and only the first.

We talked on the phone quite often after that. Some weeks I called her twice a day. Our conversations were short and stupid, and there was no way to say what I really wanted to say, so I talked about anything, the first thing that came into my head, some nonsense I hoped would make her smile. Once, I got sentimental and tried to summon up days gone by, but Clara put on her icy armor, and I soon got the message and gave up on nostalgia. As the date of the operation approached, my calls became more frequent. Once, I talked with her son. Another time with Paco. They both seemed well, they sounded well, at least not as nervous as I was. Though I'm probably wrong about that. Certainly wrong, in fact. Everyone's worried about me, Clara said one afternoon. I thought she meant her husband and her son, but "everyone" included many more people, more than I could imagine, everyone. The day before she was to go into the hospital, I called in the afternoon. Paco answered. Clara wasn't there. No one had seen her or heard from her in two days. From Paco's tone of voice I sensed that he suspected she might be with me. I told him straight up, She's not here, but that night I hoped with all my heart that she would come to my apartment. I waited for her with the lights on, and finally fell asleep on the sofa, and dreamed of a very beautiful woman, who was not Clara: a tall, slim woman, with small breasts, long legs, and deep brown eyes, who was not and never would be Clara, a woman whose presence obliterated Clara, reduced her to a poor, lost, trembling forty-something-year-old.

She didn't come to my apartment.

The next day I called Paco. And two days after that I called again. There was still no sign of Clara. The third time I called Paco, he talked about his son and complained about Clara's behavior. Every night I wonder where she could be, he said. From his voice and the turn the conversation was taking, I could tell that what he needed from me, or someone, anyone, was friendship. But I was in no state to provide him with that consolation. ♦

(*Translated, from the Spanish, by Chris Andrews.*)

THE CRITICS

BOOKS

HER OWN SOCIETY

A new reading of Emily Dickinson.

BY JUDITH THURMAN

In April of 1862, Emily Dickinson wrote to a stranger, initiating a fervent twenty-four-year correspondence, in the course of which they managed to meet only twice. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, thirty-eight, was a man of letters, a clergyman, a fitness enthusiast, a celebrated abolitionist, and a champion of women's rights, whose essays on slavery and suffrage, but also on snow, flowers, and calisthenics, appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*. "Letter to a Young Contributor," the article that inspired Dickinson to approach him, was a column addressed to literary débutantes and—despite his deep engagement with the Civil War—a paean to the bookish life: "There may be years of crowded passion in a word, and half a life in a sentence," he wrote, evoking Dickinson's poetry without yet having seen it. "Mr. Higginson," she began, with no endearment. "Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?"

Dickinson was a spinster of thirty-one, birdlike in habit and appearance, with fine chestnut hair and abnormally wide-set eyes, whose color she compared to sherry. She lived in Amherst, Massachusetts, with her parents and her sister, Lavinia, next door to her brother, Austin, and his difficult wife, Susan, whom she adored. Her father, Edward, a prominent lawyer and the treasurer of Amherst College, had a heart that was "pure and terrible," she told Higginson years later. (He found the old man more remote than forbidding.) Her mother, née Emily Norcross, was recovering from a nervous breakdown that had lasted several years, during which time the poet herself had become reclusive. The room where she worked, and spent much of her life, was furnished with a sleigh bed, a cast-iron stove, a bureau, and a writing table.

Dickinson came to Higginson in the guise of an unpublished novice, though by this point—middle age (she died at fifty-five)—she had composed hundreds of poems. Among them are some of the greatest ever written in English, but an English unique to her—an unworn language. It revives sensation at the extremities of feeling that, in most lives, habit and cliché have numbed. Few voices are more solitary than her first person, yet few are more intimate: she writes I to I. Richard B. Sewall, whose critical biography, "The Life of Emily Dickinson" (1974), is still unsurpassed, classed her with George Herbert, Wordsworth, the author of the Psalms and of Job, and, in her eerie genius for metaphor (a comparison that isn't impertinent), Shakespeare.

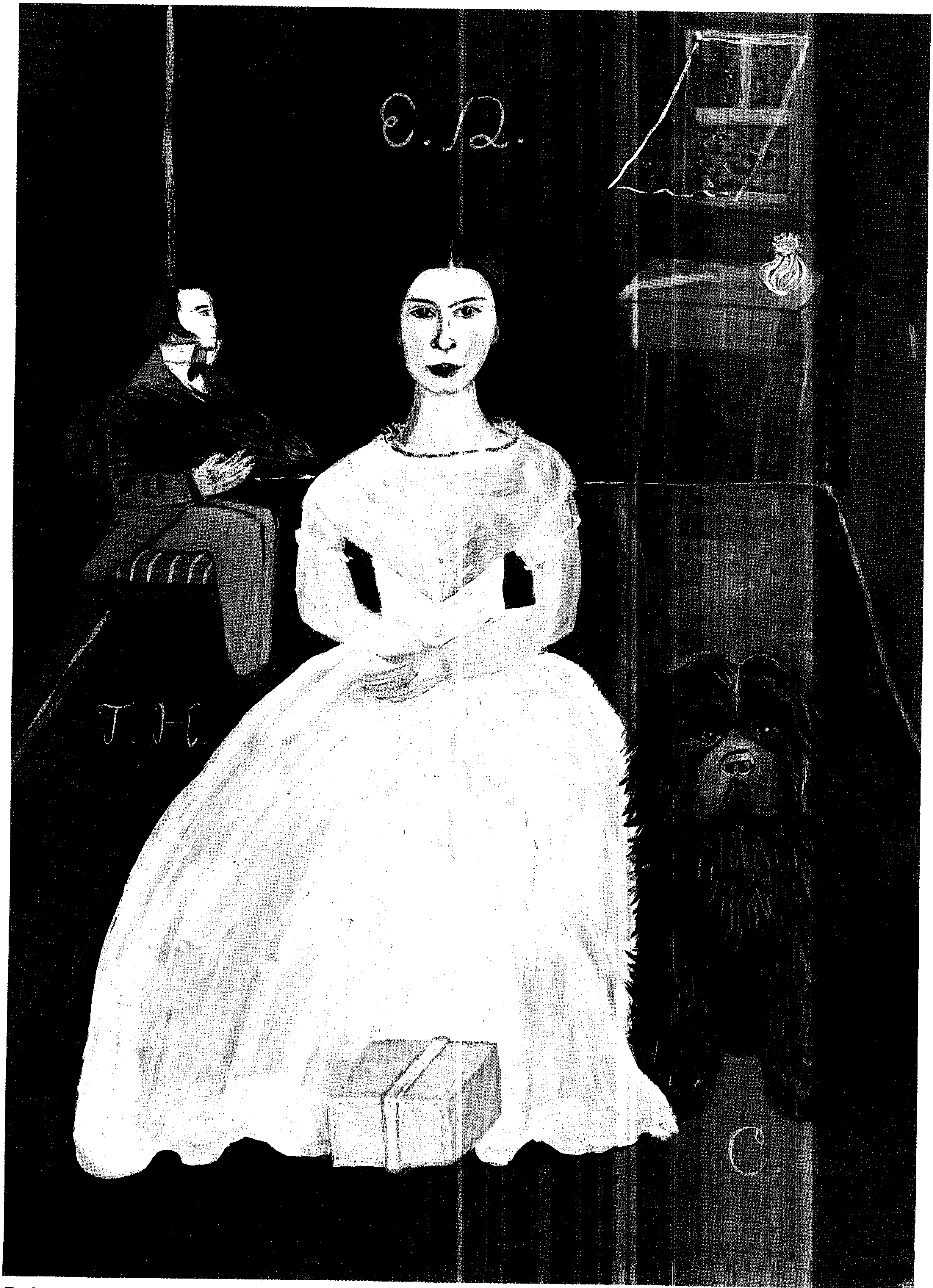
It is hard to believe that Dickinson didn't know who and what she was, even if no one else did. She kept her poems in a bureau drawer, sewn into bundles. But she had shared a few with her closest friends, among them her sister-in-law and Samuel Bowles—a driven man, famously attractive, like her new pen pal, and the editor of an influential newspaper, the Springfield *Republican*. Bowles had already printed three lyrics anonymously. She enclosed one of them in her note to Higginson (who then lived in Worcester) with three others:

> Safe in their Alabaster Chambers—
> Untouched by Morning—
> And untouched by Noon—
> Sleep the meek members of the
> Resurrection—
> Rafter of Satin—and Roof of Stone—
>
> Grand go the Years,
> In the Crescent above them—
> Worlds scoop their Arcs—
> And Firmaments—row—
> Diadems—drop—
> And Doges—surrender—
> Soundless as Dots,
> On a Disc of Snow.

Higginson, the radical, was a pious man. Dickinson, the dormouse, was a heretic who dared to call the dead suckers, conned of their heaven. Her sweetness of tone makes it easy to miss her bleak audacity. She didn't, it seems, take much of Higginson's advice (which we can only infer from her replies—his half of the correspondence disappeared), except for his suggestion that she delay publishing. But, lost at an anguished crossroads, she needed a Virgil. He had once risked his life to rescue a fugitive slave, and she was, in her way, also a fugitive.

Dickinson's letter concluded with a request not to "betray" her. Higginson never did, but many scholars, including Sewall, consider that, through an excess of caution and a deficit of imagination, he betrayed her art. His first and perhaps instinctive reaction to her verse was a tough critique, though she thanked him for the "surgery." In her next letter, she confided her inner turmoil: "I had a terror—since September—I could tell to none." After that, he was more reassuring. On June 7th, she told him, "Your letter gave no Drunkennesss, because I tasted Rum before." Baffled by the poems, beguiled by the woman, but, as a pastor, alarmed for the estranged soul, Higginson suggested that she find a friend. She actually had many, but she asked him to be her "Preceptor" (although he wasn't the only man she flattered with that honorific). An invalid wife and the war, among other imperatives, preëmpted his attention, but, fitfully, he and Dickinson stayed in touch. "Sometimes I take out your letters & verses, dear friend," he wrote in 1869 (one of only three messages to her that survived), "and when I feel their strange power, it is not strange that I find it hard

ABOVE: BENOÎT JACQUES; OPPOSITE: MAIRA KALMAN



Dickinson had written hundreds of poems, kept hidden in sewn bundles, when she approached Thomas Wentworth Higginson.

to write. . . . If I could once take you by the hand I might be something to you; but till then you only enshroud yourself in this fiery mist & I cannot reach you, but only rejoice in the rare sparkles of light."

In the course of their friendship, Higginson tried to lead this "wayward" sport of nature, whose rhymes were off, whose rhythm he called "spasmodic," whose lines were strung tensely between dashes, and who claimed the modern privilege of refusing to signify what others expected her to mean in "the direction of rules and traditions." (Her credo was "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant.") After Dickinson's death, in 1886, Lavinia asked Mabel Loomis Todd, Austin's beautiful and ambitious mistress, to edit the poems, and Higginson to help her, lending the project his prestige. (Only ten brief lyrics had appeared in her lifetime, grudgingly surrendered, and without a signature. One was attributed to Emerson.) Todd sometimes went further than Higginson would have liked in taking liberties with Dickinson's syntax, punctuation, and even her choice of words. He approved and took part in the cleanup, however. Their anthology was published in 1890, and reviews were mixed (some ecstatic, more disdainful), but almost immediately Dickinson acquired a cult following, mostly among women. They showed up in Amherst, asking directions to the Homestead, the Dickinsons' Federal manor on Main Street, which has since become a museum. The collection quickly went through eleven editions and was followed by seven others, a memoir by Mabel Todd's daughter, four volumes of letters, endless speculation about the poet's secrets, and the rise of a myth. By the nineteen-fifties, Dickinson was part of the canon (almost no one graduates from high school without having read her). Her complete works—nearly eighteen hundred poems, edited by Thomas H. Johnson, and letters, edited by Johnson and Theodora Ward, three volumes of each—were enshrined in annotated editions that restored their formal integrity, revealing the magnitude of her power but also the depths of her strangeness.

Until Higginson held the first anthology in his hands, he had doubts about the wisdom of exposing to the world the runes of a protégée whom he had described as "my partially cracked poetess." Yet the telling ironies in a relationship often aren't the apparent ones, and in a trenchant new book, "White Heat: The Friendship of Emily Dickinson and Thomas Wentworth Higginson" (Knopf; $27.95), Brenda Wineapple sets out to discover what these two people saw in each other, and what they couldn't see. In her view, Higginson's epithet wasn't dismissive, not to a romantic idealist who, into old age (he died at eighty-seven), kept searching for the portal to transcendence.

Wineapple is an astute literary biographer with a feisty prose style and a relish for unsettling received ideas. Social history—the taproot of character—is her forte, although one might also say that she has specialized in repatriating fugitive Americans: Janet Flanner, Gertrude and Leo Stein, and, most recently, Nathaniel Hawthorne. (He fits the mold if one agrees with Dickinson in defining the intellect as a patriot's "Native Land.")

Dickinson's experience, or what we know of it, has been so thoroughly archived, interpreted, and reimagined in every genre (Sewall is exhaustive, and, before him, Jay Leyda, the modernist filmmaker and film historian, produced a monumental chronology, "The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson") that a contemporary scholar needs a good excuse to exhume the picked-over bones. In rehabilitating Higginson—dispatching the caricature of a tin-eared pedant—Wineapple finds one, and, through him, brings Dickinson into focus for a new generation. The poet's impulse to seek sanctuary in isolation, and the militant's to seek justice through intervention, should, she suggests, feel familiar to us in 2008. It's an enduring schism in American history.

GIVE ME
ALL THE
MONEY
IN MY
ACCOUNT.

Wentworth Higginson, as he was known to his familiars, was the youngest of ten children, descended from a Puritan divine who had arrived in Massachusetts in 1629. A Dickinson landed in New England the following year. There was wealth, eminence, and political influence on both sides; a symmetry in the families' associations with leading colleges (Wentworth's father was a benefactor of the Harvard Divinity School); and a shared culture of civility and introspection. As Emerson's friend Samuel Ward observed in a letter to Higginson after reading Dickinson's poems:

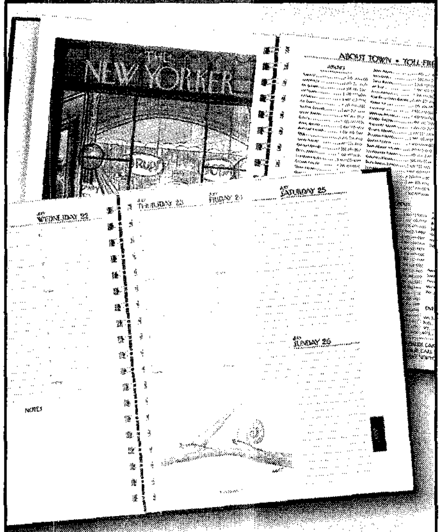
> She is the quintessence of that element we all have who are of the Puritan descent *pur sang*. We came to this country to think our own thoughts with nobody to hinder. . . . We conversed with our own souls till we lost the art of communicating with other people. The typical family grew up strangers to each other. . . . It was *awfully* high, but awfully lonesome.

Wentworth and Emily came of age, however, during a period of humanist ferment in politics, theology, and the arts—an American Enlightenment described by those who lived through it as "the Newness." The young Higginson had dreamed of becoming a great poet, but Emerson, whom he revered, rejected his submissions to *The Dial.* He married a patrician cousin, Mary Channing, whose crippling ailment seems to have been rheumatoid arthritis. Wineapple describes this interesting character as "tart" and "cantankerous." (Apropos of Dickinson, she once blurted out, "Oh why do the insane so cling to you!") They were both devoted to the radical feminism of Margaret Fuller. A woman "must be a slave or an equal," Higginson declared. "There is no middle ground." To secure a livelihood, he became a minister, but, after two years, he resigned his pulpit, under pressure (he was too much of a reformer for his congregation), to militate for abolition. Dickinson would surely have followed his exploits in the Springfield *Republican:* his failed run for Congress; his arming of anti-slavery homesteaders in Kansas; his collusion with John Brown; his storming of the Boston federal courthouse to liberate Anthony Burns, the fugitive slave who faced rendition (a brave but inept fiasco). In November of 1862, Higginson took command of and began training one of the initial regiments of black soldiers to do battle for the Union—the 1st South Carolina Volunteers. Henry James, who sat out the carnage in Newport, Rhode Island, but whose brother Wilky was wounded in the massacre at Fort Wagner, in Charleston Bay, fighting with the 54th Massachusetts—the most famous black regiment—had the gall, years later, to mock Higginson's "agitations on behalf of everything, almost, but especially of the negroes and the ladies."

There was nothing obviously cracked about the young Emily, a brilliant student and a saucy gadabout with a streak of vanity that she never outgrew. She wrote for the humor column of her school magazine, and her letters, also full of gaiety and wit, often cartooned her family. (The Dickinsons, Emily included, were never quite as proper as they seemed; beneath their clannish façade of stiff-necked gentility roiled a soap opera of mad scenes, quarrels, and illicit passions. All of them, Wineapple writes, "loved with greedy ardor.") She "rode out" with suitors, and, at, fifteen, after a trip to Boston, declared to a classmate, "The world holds a predominant place in my affections."

Emily disparaged her education to Higginson, and, compared with his (at Harvard), it was rudimentary. But she spent the last year of her schooling as a boarder at the female seminary in South Hadley, Massachusetts, that became Mount Holyoke College. The classical curriculum (Greek, Latin, sciences, and literature) included strong doses of evangelical Christianity. A religious revival was sweeping New England, and the girls were urged by their headmistress to profess "hope." Dickinson resisted defiantly, calling herself a "pagan." Belief in God, and in salvation, always tempted her, as flesh tempts a saint, but the real perdition, as she saw it, was renouncing her freedom not to conform.

Dickinson's life has a before and an after, separated by an invisible catastrophe, or perhaps by a critical mass of cumulative blows—spiritual concussions that contributed to her fragility, but also to the release of her creative powers, which came in a tremendous gush in her late twenties. She corresponded with a wide and diverse circle of friends—some ninety people we know of—but as she aged her world contracted like the footage of a blast rewound. By the time she was forty, she refused to leave the Homestead, except to see a doctor, even hiding on the second floor from acquaintances she had received for years; writing and reading after the household was asleep; tending the garden; and, until she gave up music, too, playing the piano. On several occasions, Higginson invited her to literary events in Boston, once to hear a talk by Emerson. But, much as she longed to see him, she was firm in "shunning" society. People, she explained, "talk of hallowed things, aloud—and embarrass my Dog—He and I dont object to them, if they'll exist their side." Bowles called her the "Queen Recluse," but in reality she saw whom she chose: him, her brother, Higginson, some children, and a few others. Austin told Mabel Todd, with amusement, that his sister had "posed" in many let-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ters. Her studied unworldliness—the virginal or bridal habit of a white dress; the lily proffered breathlessly to an exceptional visitor; the elfin figure fleeing at the sound of a doorbell; the pretense of "insignificance"—was also a form of camouflage:

> The Soul selects her own Society—
> Then—shuts the Door—

Dickinson's father, respecting her seclusion, didn't oblige her to attend church with the family, although he asked a local clergyman to examine her theological "soundness." She apparently passed the test of faith the way her poems did, by seeming chaste and Biblical, if you weren't paying attention. Steeped in devotional literature, she drew upon its language and cadences to record (and to dissemble) her solitary effort to accept that death *is* absolute. But death is also a metaphor for something even more fearful to Dickinson, the loss of self that often occurs in the delirium of infatuation and in the aftermath of a rejection. Higginson justly called her mist "fiery": her work scintillates with erotic tension, and even in the letters she wrote him her lowered eyes seem more geishalike than maidenly. When Dickinson loved, she was capable of shameless, imperious, wanton rapture and abjection. Anyone down to earth was apt to recoil at the totality of her demand. Most of us, however, know what she means by "a pain—so utter—

> It swallows substance up—
> Then covers the Abyss with Trance—
> So Memory can step
> Around—across—upon it—
> As one within a Swoon—
> Goes safely—where an open eye—
> Would drop Him—Bone by Bone.

Dickinson cultivated passionate friendships—complicities—with both sexes. One of her beloveds was Susan Gilbert, the lovely, combative orphan who married Austin and was Emily's most trusted reader for some thirty years. The theory that Dickinson was a lesbian shares a Dewey-decimal classification with a raft of other case studies—Emily the sufferer, performer, healer, seducer, victim, hysteric, dog lover, mystic, feminist paradigm, vestal daughter, consumptive, agoraphobic. But, in the absence of God, Dickinson never ceased hoping for a savior in a mortal guise—indeed, in a virile guise, paternally enfolding. That, in part, may be why she sought out Higginson, and why he kept his distance, despite her importunity, confessing to his wife after the first of his two visits to Amherst, in 1870, "I never was with any one who drained my nerve power so much. Without touching her, she drew from me. I am glad not to live near her."

The Homestead struck Higginson as a house "where each member runs his or her own selves." Emily told him, "I never had a mother. I suppose a mother is one to whom you hurry when you are troubled." The daughters of depressive women often feel a propitiatory impulse to make some sacrifice of their own aggression and desire, perhaps because they are afraid to overwhelm an unstable figure whom they depend on; because they feel guilty about their own vitality; or to disguise rage—as much from themselves as from their parent. In Dickinson's case, Wineapple observes, mother and daughter both "exercised power in refusal."

Her mother's mental illness coincided or overlapped with three major markers in Dickinson's biography: the "terror" she confessed to Higginson; the period of her greatest creativity; and a debacle that inspired her to draft at least three letters of heart-wrenching eloquence and infantile neediness to a lover, or a phantasm, whom she addressed as "Master," imploring him to "open your life wide, and take me in." Master's identity is one of the most tantalizing enigmas of Dickinson's story. There are two leading candidates. One is the dashing Bowles; the other, Charles Wadsworth, was a preacher famous for his oratory, who lived in Philadelphia but is known to have visited Dickinson at least twice. After his death, in 1882 (Bowles had died four years earlier), Emily described him as "my closest earthly friend." Higginson, in many ways, fits their mold: an object of fantasy to many women; prominent in the world; and married. Dickinson told him several times that he had "saved her life" in 1862, though he never knew how. Perhaps it was enough that he picked her up, albeit gingerly, when she felt discarded. But she, in turn, gave him the immortality that his own good deeds and modest gifts as a writer wouldn't otherwise have earned.

"White Heat" is written with a dry heat that does justice to its impassioned protagonists, but, as Wineapple's pendulum shifts back and forth between them, it loses its momentum. Both lives wind down, their drive sputters out, and their paths diverge—the Newness was over. Higginson remarried after Mary's death—a proper sort of wife this time, dainty and much younger. He finally fathered a much longed-for child (and, one gathers, enjoyed a long-deferred sex life).

During Dickinson's final two decades, her poetic torrent was reduced to a trickle. She developed Bright's disease, the kidney ailment that may have killed her. Her doctor also gave her a diagnosis of "nervous prostration," and she told an old friend, "I do not know the Names of Sickness. The Crisis of the sorrow of so many years is all that tires me." She, too, however, enjoyed a requited passion. Her elderly beau, Judge Otis Lord, of Salem, was a member of her father's inner circle, and she had known him all her life. While it's not clear whether their romance began before or after Lord was widowed, in 1877 (a late poem suggests that it had), it sparked an astonishingly candid, erotic correspondence that shows Emily expertly, if belatedly, playing hard to get. (" 'No,' is the wildest word we consign to Language," she teased him.)

At the end of a poem about solitude, possibly composed during the "terror," Dickinson, describing the wind, plants one of her most self-defining lines, and one that is, typically, desolate and triumphant in the same breath:

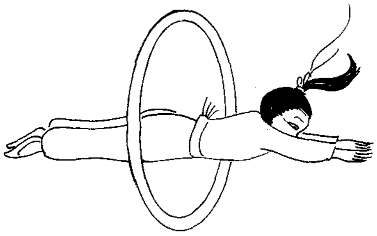
> He visited—still flitting—
> Then like a timid Man
> Again, He tapped—'twas flurriedly—
> And I became alone—

Becoming alone is the description of a task that none of us escape, and it is the drama that gives Dickinson's poetry its suspense. She expresses that suspense in all the seemingly random and eccentric dashes in her work that Higginson corrected. (He always wanted to make things right.) But they were her cracks, cracks through which the wind slipped in, and those other disembodied visitors, her metaphors and intuitions, and through which she evaded the necessity of putting a period to their mystery—or to her own. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

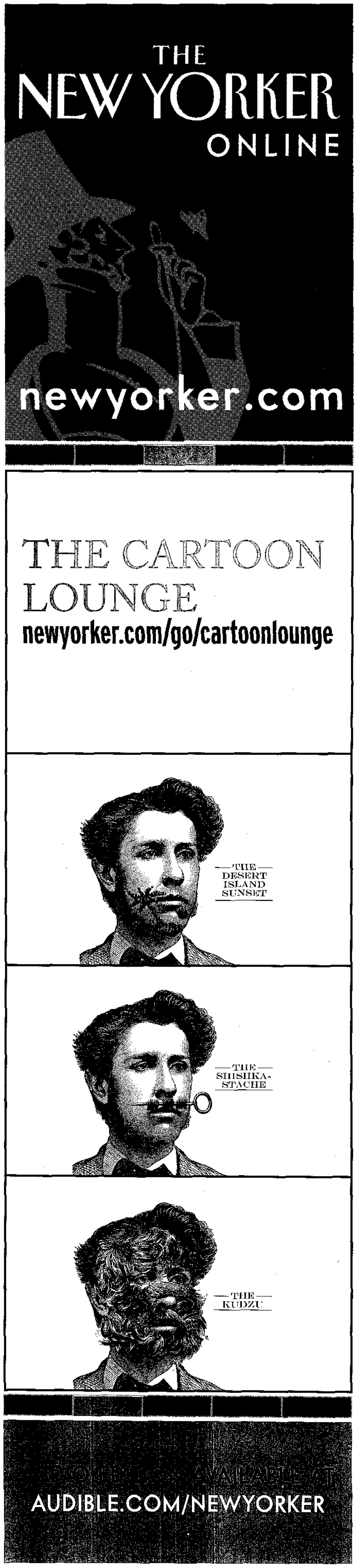
Palace Council, *by Stephen L. Carter (Knopf; $26.95).* Set primarily in the years between 1954 and 1974—what Carter calls the "two decades" of the sixties—this political thriller leaves virtually no important person or event unturned. Richard Nixon, Langston Hughes, and dissident groups all play roles as the action shifts from Harlem to Washington and Saigon. After Eddie Wesley stumbles upon the body of a prominent lawyer who died clutching the talisman of a secret society in his fist, he finds himself caught up in the machinations of spies and assassins. Untangling the so-called Palace Council's purpose gains new urgency when Eddie's sister suddenly vanishes. At the same time, Aurelia, the ex-girlfriend for whom he still carries a torch, is on her own path to discovering the enigmatic group's secrets. While Carter offers a finely drawn picture of the complicated black social world, and the high-reaching conspiracy has its allure, he seems to strain to pull his story together—discarded candy wrappers become a clue to the anticlimactic finish.

On a Day Like This, *by Peter Stamm, translated from the German by Michael Hofmann (Other; $23.95).* The main characters in the novels of this Swiss writer can seem aloof to the point of being anesthetized, and their stories often begin with a moment of rupture. Andreas is a forty-something German teacher in Paris whose life consists of monotonous routines and impersonal encounters. "Emptiness was the normal state of things," Stamm writes. Yet when he develops a bad cough he decides not to wait for his biopsy results; he quits his job and sells his apartment to seek out a girl from his youth, with whom he thinks he may still be in love. Stamm's affectless tone belies the richness of his psychological portraiture; in spite of attempts to shrug off connections ("He had always been careful not to be loved too much himself"), Andreas is driven to revisit primal scenes of loss and mourning.



The Night of the Gun, *by David Carr (Simon & Schuster; $26).* "Every hangover begins with an inventory," Carr, a columnist for the *Times*, writes in this bracingly honest memoir. In sharp and sometimes poetic prose, the author takes a detailed inventory of his years of drug addiction, chronicling the slide from drinking and marijuana use during his teen years in Minneapolis to shooting cocaine and smoking crack while trying to maintain his life as a reporter and the father of twin girls. Carr is meticulous in the investigation of his past, reconstructing events with the aid of police reports, magazine rejection letters, and more than sixty interviews with friends, former dealers, and fellow-addicts. His journalistic skills are on full display as he works to excavate the truth from his often hazy memories. He evinces genuine remorse for his frequently reprehensible behavior and succeeds in creating something more than merely another entry in what he terms the "growing pile of junkie memoirs."

Universe of Stone, *by Philip Ball (Harper; $27.95).* In this lively biography of Chartres Cathedral, Ball explores the configuration of cultural and technological factors that enabled Europe to achieve a "liberation from gravity" in the twelfth century, including the rise of scholasticism, Platonic obsessions with light and proportion, and heroic masons who "turned geometry into stone." The accomplishments of Gothic architecture were all the more remarkable given that stonework was virtually forgotten in the West in the centuries after Rome fell. Though much of the history of Chartres Cathedral remains opaque, Ball's account of its construction reveals fascinating details (such as the origins of its blue glass, likely scavenged from Roman or Byzantine sites) and evokes its raison d'être: in an era when architecture "existed to reveal the deep design of God's creation," Chartres "encoded a set of symbols and relationships that mapped out the universe itself."



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THE ART WORLD

FEELING BLUE

Artists get serious.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

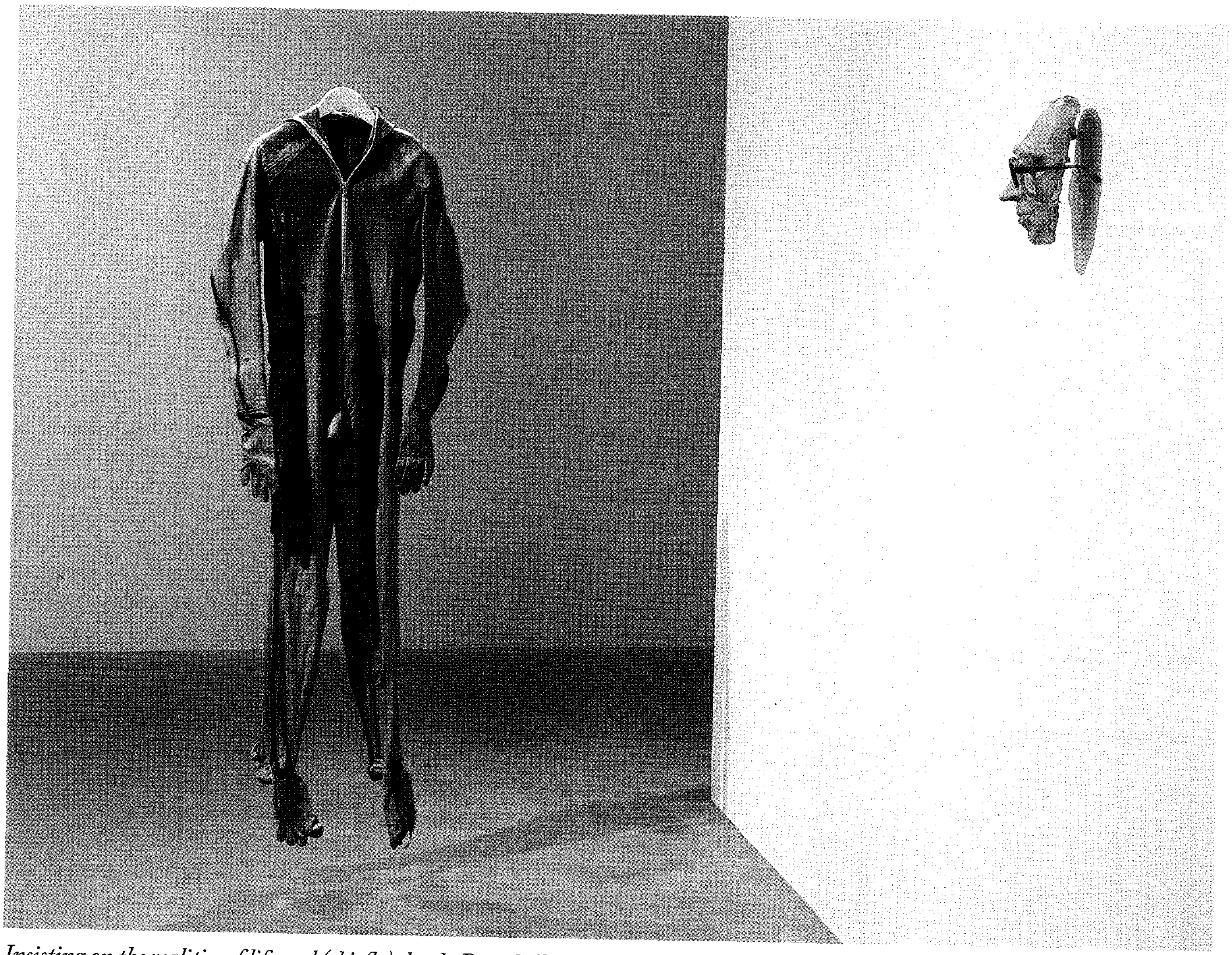
"After Nature" is an important group show of twenty-six international artists, past and present, at the New Museum, which proposes a saturnine new direction in art. The catalogue is a foldout slipcover around a paperback of "After Nature," a book-length poem in three parts by W. G. Sebald. It's an arresting gesture. The rapturously depressive German writer, who died in 2001, would seem an unlikely hero for contemporary avant-gardists, who have been more easily imagined reading comic books. The first two sections of the dauntingly erudite work—on the Northern Renaissance painter Matthias Grünewald and on the German naturalist Georg Steller, a participant in a disastrous Arctic expedition led by Vitus Bering in 1741—exude Old World gravitas, laced with obsessive descriptions of material ruin, physical disease, and mental suffering. The third, which is roughly autobiographical, quotes "King Lear" and expresses anguish directly: "Oh,/you are men of stones. . . . Water? Fire? Good?/Evil? Life? Death?" But Sebald's signature tone is dead calm. His conjurings of historical and personal loss, which in his novels and memoirs are usually keyed to the calamities of the Second World War, happen to you slowly, as you read, like the onset of a cold. (I'm an admirer but not a fan.) What young artist would want to get mixed up with such connoisseurship of remote sorrows?

The museum's director of special exhibitions, Massimiliano Gioni, who curated the show, is confident of Sebald's Pied Piper appeal, as he is of Werner Herzog's—the director's gorgeous and dire film on the aftermath of the Gulf War, "Lessons of Darkness" (1992), excerpts of which are loop-projected on the first of the show's three floors, is another touchstone. Gioni also cites Cormac McCarthy's post-apocalyptic novel, "The Road" (2006), writing of a rising sensibility haunted by "the destabilizing sensation of having come upon the remains of our own civilization after its extinction," transfixed by "offended sceneries and scorched earth," and hankering for qualities of the "pure, distant, and extreme" in "a sphere that is, if not religious, at least sacred or obscure, like a mystery cult." Remarkably, the visual goods on display endorse Gioni's rhetoric. Something is happening in artists' studios: a shift of emphasis, from surface to depth, and a shift of mood, from mania to melancholy, shrugging off the allures of the money-hypnotized market and the spectacle-bedizened biennials circuit. (In fact, the underappreciated recent Whitney Biennial hinted at the mutation.) It's a fashion auditioning as a sea change.

The selections of unfamiliar past art in "After Nature" nonplus the viewer, by evident design. There are cameraless photographs, called "Celestographs," made in 1894 by August Strindberg, the playwright, who exposed film to the night sky in hopes of capturing starscapes; he decided that the results had metaphysical import, despite comprising only traces of dust and chemical discoloration. Hand-lettered, delirious sermons by the Reverend Howard Finster (1916-2001), a Georgian *bricoleur,* and surreal abstractions by Eugene von Bruenchenhein (1910-83), a working-class Milwaukeean, admit outsiders to the collegial mix. And little-known films by the late sculptor and painter Nancy Graves—obsessive studies, from the early nineteen-seventies, of camels, frigate birds, and the moon—contribute a note of, in Gioni's words, "cosmic stupor." These things share a driven sincerity; they couldn't be made by anyone who didn't mean them. One work jars, instructively: a dangling, taxidermied horse, its head (if it has one) buried high up in a wall, by the internationally celebrated, zingy satirist Maurizio Cattelan. Cattelan's horse comes off as gaudy and smug—emblematic of a cul de sac (art as engineered sensation, more or less) that most of the artists in the show strive to escape.

The major surprise is the sculpture of Pawel Althamer, a forty-one-year-old artist based in Warsaw, whose animal-intestine-skinned, straw-stuffed, naked people, among other works, give an old-fashioned humanism the burning presence of an angry revenant. Althamer's art discounts considerations of style to insist on realities of life and (chiefly) death, as does a bolted-together and propped (and perhaps needlessly large) reconstruction of a dead tree, by the American Zoe Leonard. Other artists pile on raw-nerved provocations: the Italian Diego Perrone, with photographs of maw-like holes in arid ground, some with a naked man who seems to contemplate a suicidal plunge; the New Yorker Dana Schutz, with an Expressionist painting called "Man Eating His Chest"; the Pole Artur Zmijewski, with a video in which naked able-bodied people become living prostheses for naked victims of maiming, helping a one-legged man walk and a man without fingers shampoo his hair; and the Pakistani-born American Huma Bhabha, with "legs, and arms, and heads" (2008), a big, truly scary skull in several mediums.

If the common run of contemporary art risks triviality in the pursuit of seduction, the new kind incurs hysteria as a toll of earnest intensity. Emotional reach exceeds formal grasp throughout the show, and certain melodramatic lurches fail entirely. (I don't care what Robert Kusmirowski intends by his painstaking reconstruction of the Unabomber Ted Kaczynski's cabin; it's dumb.) But the futility of artistic technique in the face of world conditions may constitute a subject for art as substantial as any other, and rather more compelling than today's stacked-deck models of success. Bhabha's gruesome death's-head neatly—that is to say, messily—critiques Damien Hirst's famous diamond-encrusted skull, which sold last year for a reported hundred million dollars. Work like Bhabha's tacitly cancels the credit of artists who allude to terror and horror without personal investment. Existentialist standards of authenticity may be back in force, however fleetingly. How much can we bear of art that, like Sebald's writing, glories in bot-



Insisting on the realities of life and (chiefly) death: Pawel Althamer's "Skin" (1997) and "Self Portrait (Mask)" (2008).

BENOIT PAILLEY/COURTESY NEW MUSEUM

tomless malaise? I expect we'll find out.

You suspect that a big change is coming when sensitive young people project (and, because they're young, enjoy) feelings of being old. This has often signalled a backward crouch preceding a forward leap. I think of Picasso's world-weary blue period, T. S. Eliot's "Gerontion" and "Prufrock," and the budding Abstract Expressionists' wallows in Jungian mythology. The syndrome announces the exhaustion of a received cultural situation, whose traditions are slack and whose future is opaque. It typically entails nostalgia for real or fancied past ages that dealt—successfully, in retrospect—with similar crises. Many of the New Museum artists return in spirit to the last era when events crushed imagination, that of Sebald's seedtime: the Second World War, the brand-new atom bomb. Alberto Giacometti and Samuel Beckett hover as tutelary ghosts. The show's symbolic heart is a work by the young British-born, Berlin-based artist Tino Sehgal: a live dancer (from a rotating crew of eight) elegantly performing, in street clothes, a slow-motion writhe on the floor, oblivious to viewers. The sight stirs a feeling of existential anxiety, given momentary relief in wanton gracefulness. (Not knowing whether to stare or not to stare, I found myself somehow doing both at once.)

Politically, the new art is benumbed. Desperate to eschew narcissisms of money and fame, along with academically entrenched ideology, the artists operate at psychological depths at which social attitudes can't coalesce. (This is an interesting counterpoint in a summer when politics of the get-out-the-vote kind generates something like avant-gardist passion among young people suddenly excited to deem themselves citizens.) Religion—after a century and a half of modern movements that conceived one secular substitute after another—is very much at issue. Gnostic intimations glimmer in the show. There is a smack about it of intellectual despair. Wasn't God supposed to be dead? Abruptly, once-settled views and values have unsettled themselves and stalk the mind.

Because we are talking about contemporary art, in the contemporary art world, silly froth is sure to fleck the developing wave. In the catalogue, the New Museum's energetic director, Lisa Phillips, hazards topical referents: "earthquake and flooding in China, the cyclone in Myanmar, the tornadoes and flooding in Iowa." Get ready for neo-Romantic doting on miscellaneous catastrophes, with global warming the default alarm. There is nothing new in our culture which can't be faddified. What we want now is a major artist—a Manet, Picasso, Pollock, Warhol, or Beuys—who will manifest durable truths at the core of inevitable hypes and hyperboles. If none such appears, that will be a valuable datum. It will help us adjust to the happenstance that, once and finally, our particular civilization is spent. ♦

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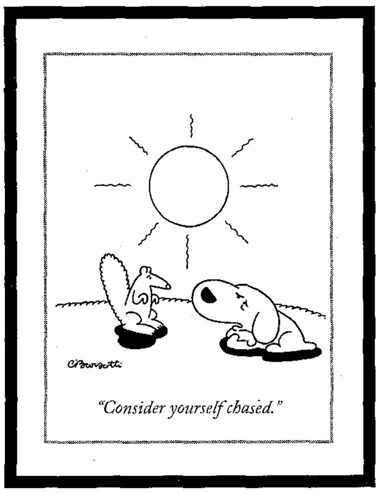

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POP MUSIC

LA VIDA NO LOCA

Coldplay's expanding gas.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

In a 2005 piece in the *Times*, Jon Pareles called the British rock group Coldplay "the most insufferable band of the decade," and he placed the blame on the band's front man and singer, Chris Martin, whom he called a "passive-aggressive blowhard." Earlier this year, in a study sponsored by the hotel chain Travelodge of the bedtime habits of 2,248 people in the U.K., Coldplay topped a poll of music choices that would help people fall asleep. Coldplay apparently relieves what Travelodge called the "pressures of modern living." Martin may use the same metric to judge his band's music. On coldplay.com, you can find a handwritten note, dated "Thursday 12 June London," that addresses the recent release of the band's fourth studio album, "Viva la Vida or Death and All His Friends." "I feel very relieved that the album is finally released out into the big wide world today," it says. "I hope there's songs on there that will make a shit day slightly less shit, or a good day even better." The album sold more than seven hundred thousand copies in the first week of its release in the United States. (Since the group's début album, "Parachutes," was released, in 2000, news items about the troubled entertainment conglomerate EMI routinely correlate the health of the corporation with the health of Coldplay.)

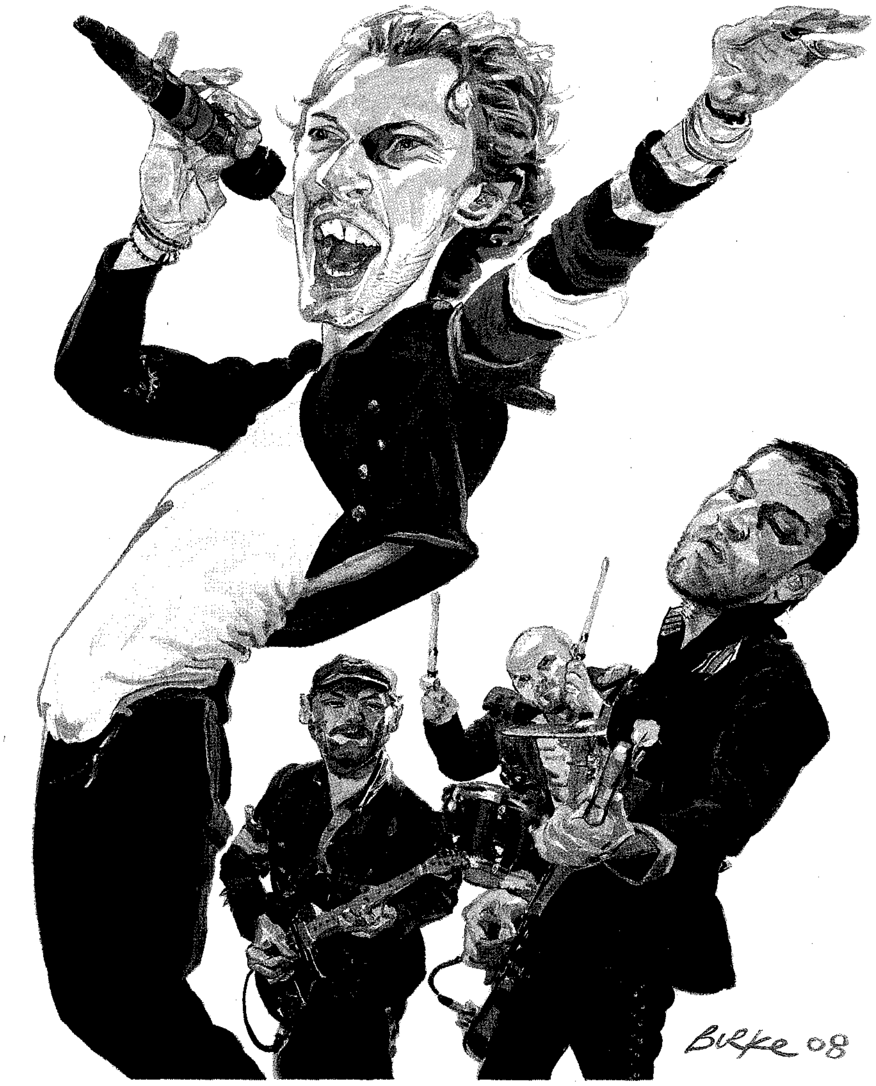
Is Coldplay warm milk or just quietly dependable? Don't ask Martin, who has transformed the English art of diffidence into a masochistic religion: "We owe them a career, really," he has said of Radiohead. He has also said, "Like millions of people in the world, I can't listen to Coldplay." He's half right about Radiohead—Coldplay exhibits a taste for melancholy and smeared, stretched-out sounds that leads straight back to Thom Yorke and his friends. The main antecedent is U2, who invented the form that Coldplay works within: rock that respects the sea change of punk but still wants to be as chest-thumping and anthemic as the music of the seventies stadium gods. Translated, this means short pop songs that somehow summon utterly titanic emotions and require you to skip around in triumphant circles and pump your fist, even if it is not entirely clear what you are singing about.

The link to U2 has been made explicit on "Viva la Vida," which was co-produced by Brian Eno, the man who moved U2 from a feisty, soccer-chant style into the expansive and hypnotic sound that has defined the rest of their career. The problem is that Coldplay doesn't seem to have unplumbed depths, or a voice as distinctive as either Bono's or the Edge's, whose guitar is U2's second vocalist. The guys in Coldplay are a sweet bunch, and their best songs are modest affairs. "Yellow" was the track that made them famous eight years ago. There's some guitar work that echoes the Edge's—chiming, small chords played high on the neck and repeated, over and over, pushing the song away from the divisions of song form and closer to the ecstasy of the drone (when it works)—but the core of the song is Martin serenading someone with the oldest trick in the book: "Look at the stars, look how they shine for you, and all the things that you do." It's a big fat "Aw!," and it gets me every time.

"Yellow" is one of Martin's few straightforward lyrics. For the band's second album, Martin started singing in free-floating slogans. "Am I part of the cure? Or am I part of the disease?" is a line from "Clocks," perhaps the group's loveliest song. The music evokes the song's name, revolving around three circling and falling piano arpeggios. The payoff comes when Martin stretches out the words "you are" in a falsetto sung over the piano figure. You are what? Go figure, and I haven't the slightest idea what is going on with the "tides" and the "clocks" in the lyrics. Doesn't matter. "Clocks" is a big-budget "Ooh!" with lots of pretty lights—it works. At the end of the song, Martin repeatedly sings, "Home, home, where I wanted to go." There's the only part you need take note of—an essentially conservative sentiment, and probably a comfort zone for a guy who grew up thinking he wasn't particularly cool and lost his virginity at the age of twenty-two.

I've always wanted to like Coldplay for just that attribute. They're a band of nice young lads being rewarded for niceness. But on the band's third album, "X&Y," a need to Signify Something began to overwhelm the charm. The little bouquet of roses on the doorstep became an oversized vessel filled with cloying, synthetic gas.

The title track of "Viva la Vida"—also known as the "iPod song," because it is used in an Apple ad—is easily the best thing about the album. Don't go to the lyrics for any cues; it is entirely obscure why such a jaunty, upbeat song would be referencing "Roman cavalry choirs" or revolutionaries or St. Peter. Martin is the king? Was the king? Whatevs. Coldplay knows how to build a song that draws you in with easy, karaoke-ready moves. I spent a weekend hearing an eight-year-old and an eleven-year-old sing the song (fighting about the lyrics, and sometimes rewriting them), and I never tired of the melody. After that, though, you are on your own. There are Eno touches that catch the ear: the chattering strings and bell-like keyboards that close out "Death and All His Friends," or the timbre of the instrumental "Life in Technicolor," which sounds like it's emanating from the end of a long metal tube. "Technicolor" is one of the album's few concise, concentrated pieces of writing; the rest sounds both incomplete and puffed up, like scraps of previous records scrambled and rearranged. This upending of their style isn't even radical enough to be bad. "Viva la Vida" is an album that keeps going out of focus, a series of disconnected pieces that is impossible to hold on to. And why are they wearing all those vaguely military jackets? What's with Liberty leading the people on the cover? They must know that beyond the cozy confines of London there are a couple of major conflicts going on. It does not feel like the moment, especially for such a vague band, to be playing with any symbols of war.



Chris Martin has transformed English diffidence into a masochistic religion.

PHILIP BURKE

All of this is a paid vacation in Ibiza compared to the Madison Square Garden show, in June. The concert, as you may have heard, was a freebie. As the Rolling Stones have taught us, nobody loves money more than a rich man, and I was impressed that this almost unnaturally successful band gave away a night in such a large venue. Good for Chris Martin, I thought. But guess who reminded us, three separate times, that the concert was free? There Martin was, onstage in his Little Bummer Boy outfit, skipping around and waving his fists. Except the crowd wasn't going wild, and the music wasn't calling for a celebration. Though the audience was obviously delighted to see Coldplay appear, the energy in the room remained fairly controlled throughout the set, even dipping to indifference at points. Which made Martin's moves seem that much more canned. It felt as if he'd done the entire show in a mirror, down to the self-deprecating wisecracks. In one of his increasingly suspect apologies, Martin told his American fans, "We come over here, we steal your women." That's right. If anyone in the audience had forgotten, Chris Martin is married to an actress named Gwyneth Paltrow. She's American. Maybe you've heard of her. No? Well, did you know that "Viva la Vida" went to No. 1? No? It's O.K.—Martin told us, by way of thanking us.

No, dude, thank *you*. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

INDIE LOVE

"In Search of a Midnight Kiss."

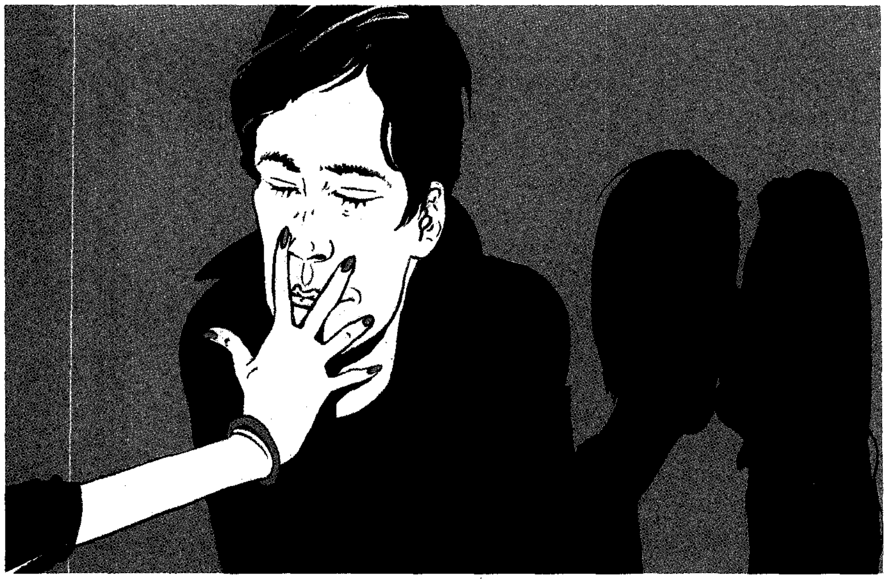
BY ANTHONY LANE

Unless your name is Judas, a kiss is just a kiss. Nonetheless, filmmakers cling to the smooch in the hope, or the fond pretense, that it might mean something more. Despite everything, it remains the most trusted image that we have for the clinching of an erotic deal: the zinger of our desires. How do we feel, then, when a movie like "In Search of a Midnight Kiss" *begins* with kisses—loads of them, exchanged between lovers who are never identified? Should that strike us as romantic reassurance, staunchly insisting that love is all around, or as a sly debasing of the currency, hinting that the simple meeting of mouths is no big deal?

Judging from the rest of the story, the answer is "Both." The film has picked up momentum, and a ripple of affection, over many festival showings in the past year, and its young writer-director, Alex Holdridge, must be relieved to see his work finally earn a commercial release. (Some films never break free of the festival circuit; some, indeed, seem to have been designed expressly for the titillation of festival audiences and nobody else.) Yet in Holdridge's movie there is as much to repel as there is to allure, and I cannot imagine leaving a screening of it in anything less than two minds. Take his hero, Wilson (Scoot McNairy): a pallid misfit, clearly nursing a litany of grudges against the world, and torn between the snarl and the whimper as the proper default mode of the self-possessed. "That was me, the lonely hunker-down type," he tells us, in an opening voice-over, glossing a shot of himself as a clerk in a video store. Since the rise of Quentin Tarantino, that particular choice of career counts as a badge of wounded honor—the Purple Heart of the geek generation.

Wilson lives in Los Angeles, though his residence feels provisional and fleeting. No longer a video clerk, he is occupied with writing screenplays, or, as we say here on Earth, unemployed. He shares a house with the lanky Jacob (Brian Matthew McGuire) and with Jacob's girlfriend, Min (Katie Luong). The film kicks off on New Year's Eve—the moment when, as Wilson says, "time itself takes center stage," and when all cinematic characters are constitutionally required to feel sorry for themselves. Jacob is planning to mark the occasion by proposing to Min, and Wilson, too, is paying homage to her, in his gentlemanly fashion, by Photoshopping a picture of her face onto one of a naked body, and pleasuring himself—if you can call it pleasure—in front of the result. In its sad, filthy solitude, this may be an all too credible précis of modern movie love: we started out with Rudolph Valentino, and we wind up with Onan the Barbarian.

Jacob, who catches Wilson in the act, urges him to reach out and meet other people, and Wilson obliges by logging on to Craigslist and advertising himself as a misanthrope, seeking the same. Again, note how technology is changing not just the rules of emotional engagement but the basic shape of those emotions, shrinking the art of flirtation to a lubricious shrug; online, every date grows blind. Older film directors could be forgiven for not getting this, or for not wanting to know, and thus the field, however barren, is left open for Holdridge and his kind. Wilson gets a call, and a voice asks, "Are you the misanthrope?" "Are you the misanthropee?" he replies, and the upshot is that the pair arrange—sight unseen, of course—to meet. And what a sight the voice turns out to be: Vivian (Sara Simmonds), a bristling, hard-smoking package of bad attitude, in boots and big shades. Is he really expected to spend the rest of the evening with this gorgon? Personally, I would rather ring in the New Year with Eva Braun, but everyone to his taste.



Scoot McNairy as the misfit hero in Alex Holdridge's précis of modern movie romance.

The deal is, Vivian explains, that if Wilson doesn't work out—please her, amuse her, satisfy her unreadable needs—by sunset she will find someone else. What a strange ultimatum that is, at once romantic in the drama of its request and fiercely anti-romantic in the spitefulness of its threat. And that pretty much sums up the mixed mood in which Holdridge's film unfolds, and which makes it such a neat distillation of what we mean by American independent cinema: the compulsion to proceed by nudges and sidelong glances, to build a character through the accumulation of quirks, and to gesture toward the deep end of human behavior and then dart quickly away. If mainstream Hollywood cleaves to the

ISTVAN BANYAI

story arc, indie creators prefer the story sine wave, with a trough for every peak. When Richard Linklater made "Slacker," in 1991, he can hardly have dreamed that slackerdom—the reluctance not merely to get a life but to give a damn on any score whatever—would be the base-level approach of a hundred movies to come. Near the start of "In Search of a Midnight Kiss," Wilson declares, "I've been in a total daze and bordering on suicide," yet we don't panic on his behalf, because we interpret his words as merely slackerese for "I'm bored."

To that extent, he and Vivian are well matched, and so begins their destination-free odyssey around L.A. Being carless for most of the time, they take the subway. Viewers in other countries, who know the city only from films, could be forgiven for not realizing that it *has* a subway; they know that it has at least one bus route, thanks to "Speed," but beyond that their best guess would be that Angelenos are born in their cars and die there. (There was a subway in Michael Mann's luminous "Collateral," though its main purpose was not to go anywhere but to allow Tom Cruise to leap madly onto the rear car.) Weirder still, Vivian and Wilson get out at their chosen stop and then walk, ambling through districts that feel chipped and defaced, both half forgotten and half built. At one point, the couple slip into the Orpheum, and Vivian climbs onstage and pleads for a part—"something sexy and edgy, and something where I get to use a knife." Oh, please. You can't dismiss the scene, however, because as she removes her dark glasses we see, for the first time, that she really is lovely and lost.

Such is the way of this movie. Its leading figures are hugely vain about their feelings, and I wouldn't wish to arbitrate on which of them is the more annoying: it's a close call between the motor-mouthed Vivian and Wilson, who announces that to withdraw his last hundred bucks from an A.T.M. and take her out to dinner would make him "feel like a man." Yeah, Gary Cooper was the same. And yet Holdridge, in consort with his director of photography, Robert Murphy, has delivered a beautiful piece of work. It is shot in black-and-white—proper black, as rich and as sleek as cat's fur, not the washed-out tin grays that you might expect. Murphy is treading in the footsteps of the James Wong Howe who shot "Sweet Smell of Success" and the Gordon Willis who shot "Manhattan," but something has changed in the impact of such suavity. The first of those films was about a monster, Burt Lancaster's gossip columnist, and the second was about a bunch of clever narcissists, yet all these characters craved and deserved the gorgeous vitality of the visions around them. "I love this dirty town," Lancaster said, sniffing the New York air. "This is really a great city," Woody Allen echoed. Vivian and Wilson, on the other hand, seldom enthuse over their adopted home; half the time, they barely notice it's there.

To praise the beauty of this film, then, is not enough; what lends it tension is that it's wrapped around people for whom beauty is at best an anachronism and at worst an embarrassing joke, like gracious conduct or any hint of duty or service—all the stuff that belongs to big-studio cinema, with its superheroes and stuck-up guys in period costume. It is as if Vivian and Wilson know they are stranded in a good-looking movie and want to bluster their way out; hence their gushes of profanity instead of wit, which are designed to needle anyone who is old enough to think that romance should avail itself of charm. "Did you or did you not trim your pubic hair before we met?" Wilson asks. By far the most interesting character is Min, Jacob's intended, and that's because she is the least voluble—holding something of herself back, as if guarding a mystery. Toward the end, she suddenly comes on to Wilson, whereupon he recoils and backs away, exposed, for all his obscene chatter, as the prudish kid that he is. Something similar happens when Vivian weeps on the subway, her grief endowed with a false intensity by the song ladled onto the soundtrack; do droning, off-key vocals and a picky guitar really make her less of a spoiled brat? Maybe that is what binds the inhabitants of the indie universe, here as elsewhere: they are like children, playing at adult life. Their bodies may have grown up, but their spirits, as shown in their tantrums and tiny attention spans, are still half formed, and I, for one, find it hard to summon much sympathy for their unimportant plights. Now and then, a director breaks through that carapace of immaturity and discovers a genuine ache of love in the sparring of boy-meets-girl, as Linklater, progressing from "Slacker," did with "Before Sunrise" and "Before Sunset." Let's hope that Alex Holdridge follows the same path. The trick is to find your midnight kisses, then move on. ♦

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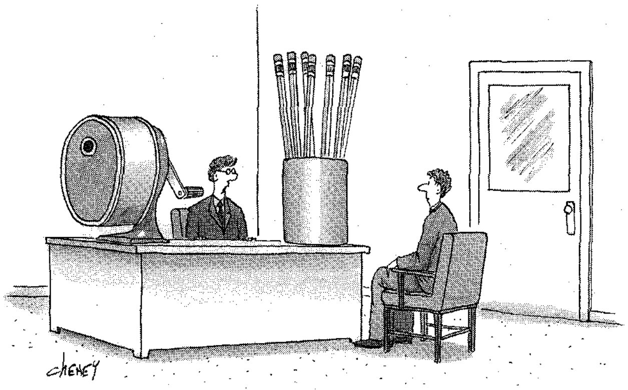
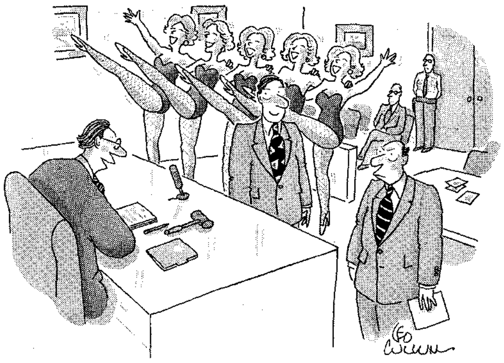
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Lee Lorenz, must be received by Sunday, August 3rd. Finalists in the July 21st contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the August 25th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Let's continue this discussion over a hot barrel of coffee."
Adam Caraher, New York City



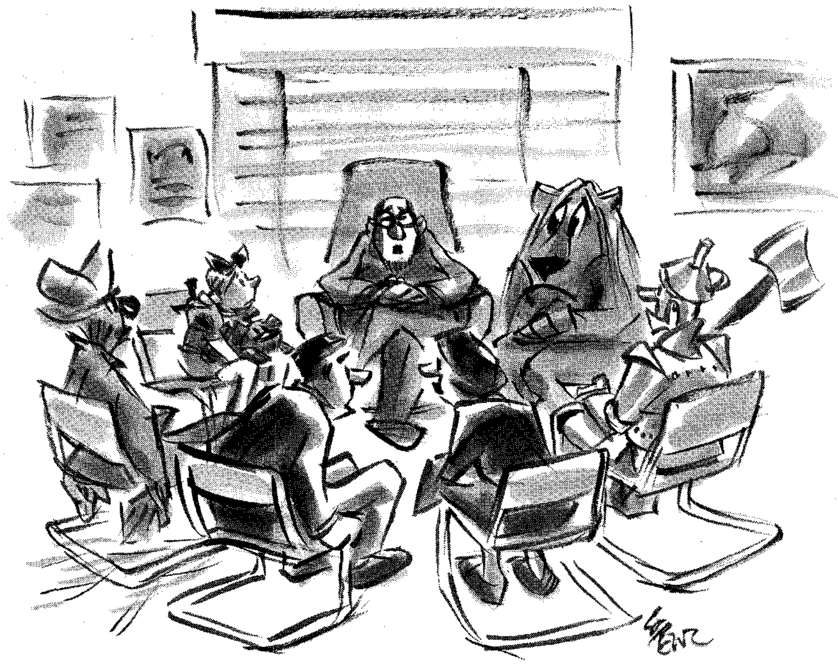
THE FINALISTS

"I know you have the law and the facts on your side, but I'm going with the dancing girls on this one."
Mark Nebrig, Charlotte, N.C.

"The jury foreman will now sing the verdict."
Hughes Richardson, Afton, Okla.

"Overruled, counsellor. This is sweeps week."
Joseph Taylor, Beaufort, S.C.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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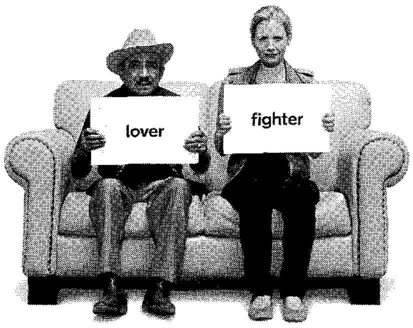
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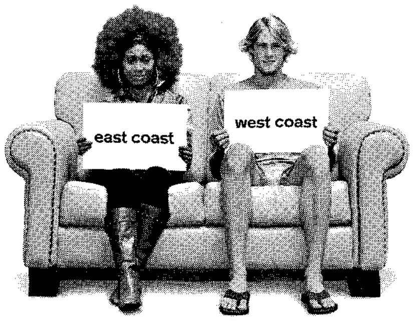
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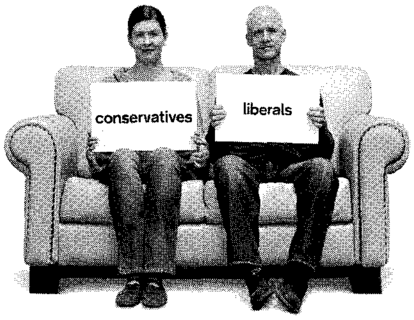
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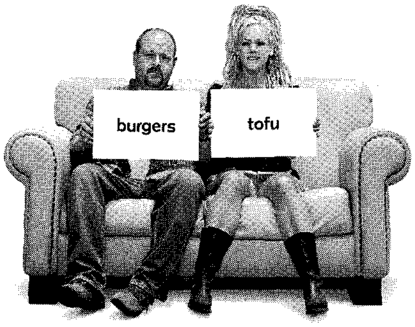
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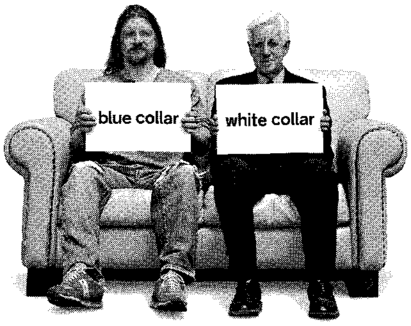
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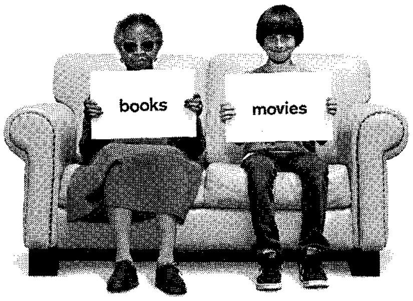
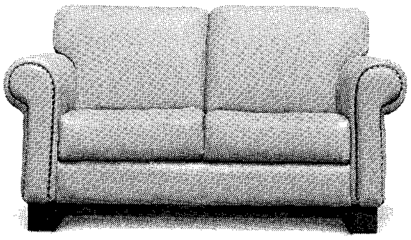
football


books
movies

It's American to disagree. It's also American to come together in the face of a challenge. And few challenges are as urgent as global climate change. More than a million people from all walks of life have come together to demand solutions. Now we need you. Take a minute and join us at wecansolveit.org. Together we can solve the climate crisis.



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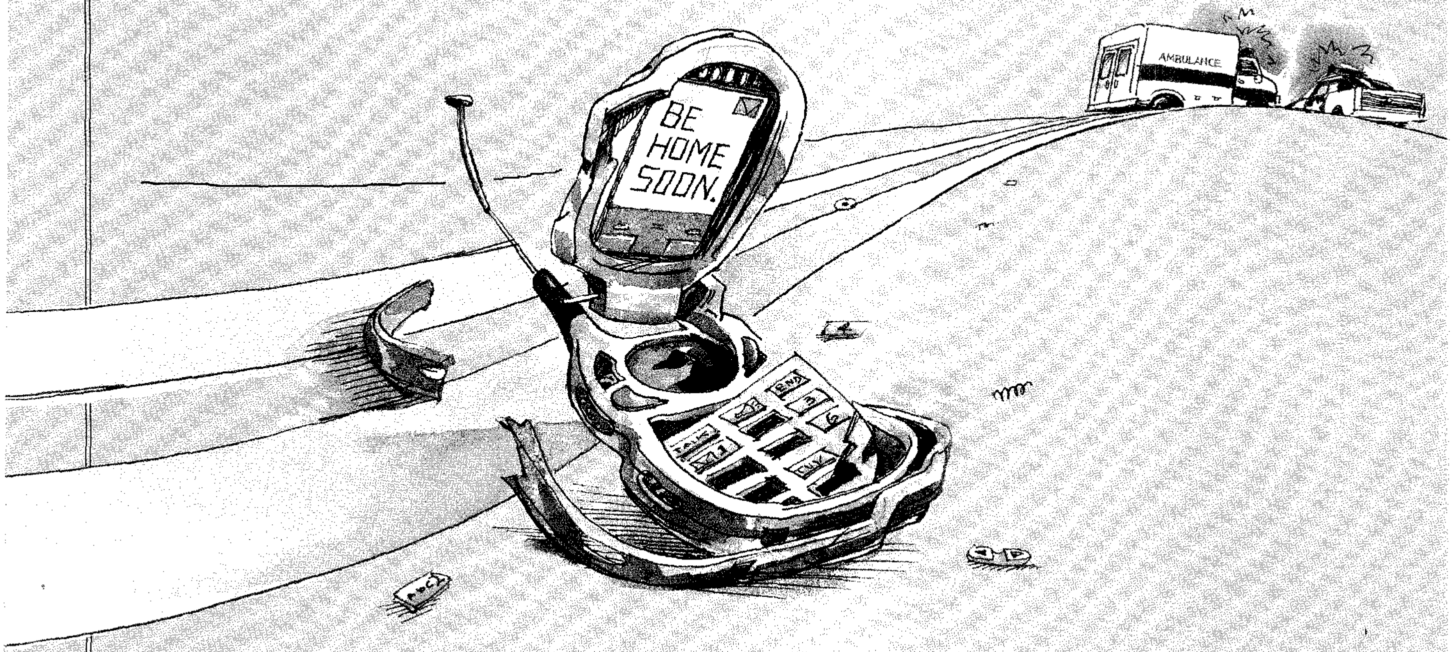
Nearly one third of teens admit to texting while driving.

SOME OF THEM WILL NEVER BE HEARD FROM AGAIN.



Car crashes are the leading cause of death among American teens. **Is any text message worth that risk?**

A recent survey showed that teens consider texting while driving to be extremely distracting. Texting not only takes their minds off the road but also takes their hands off the wheel.

Allstate has a few ideas to help curb the epidemic:

USE THE LAW.
Support state legislation banning digital distractions. The State of California has now banned anyone under the age of 18 from using cell phones, laptop computers, pagers or any text-messaging device while driving.

STRENGTHEN GRADUATED DRIVER LICENSING (GDL) LAWS.
GDL laws put limitations on teen driving so kids can gain experience safely. Since North Carolina implemented one of the most comprehensive GDL laws in the country, it has seen a 25% decline in crashes involving 16-year-olds.

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75% of teens surveyed said their parents would be the best influence in getting them to drive more safely. The Allstate Parent-Teen Driving Contract can help start the conversation. **Contact an Allstate Agent to get a copy or visit Allstate.com/teen for the interactive contract.**

Let's help teens realize the importance of giving the road their undivided attention.

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